

# **The Role of Identity in India's Expanding Naval Power**



**A Thesis Presented**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the end of the Cold War Indian political elites have demonstrated a remarkable predilection towards naval power in India's grand strategy. Today, a naval modernization program is on the Indian agenda with emphasis on both the foreign acquisition and domestic construction of warships, submarines and battle fleets. The expensive capability accretion program is matched by a new penchant for articulating expansive naval doctrines and maritime strategy. This is a radical departure from the past where the Indian strategic community has often bemoaned the Indian political elite's apparent ignorance of the potential of naval power. A number of reasons can be advanced to explain this change in the Indian political elite's perception towards naval power. The predominant view in the literature favours material factors and India's structural position as a source of this emerging maritime consciousness among the Indian political elite. While there are many compelling reasons for India to build a strong navy, this thesis suggests that an ideational factor related to India's aspirations towards a new identity in the international system is an additional factor. India's aspiration to become an Asia-Pacific power informs the Indian political elite's new-found enthusiasm for naval power. As the Asia-Pacific region and the maritime disputes in the Asia-Pacific region assume growing importance in international politics, it is all the more important to understand India's aspirations to transform itself into an Asia-Pacific power and how this shapes its naval strategy.

## Acknowledgement

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First and foremost, my deepest gratitude to my supervisors for allowing me the full freedom to explore on my own, and at the same time providing me the guidance to recover when my steps faltered. Professor Nel has demonstrated much patience and kindness in going through my less inspiring drafts time and again, and showing me the right way of academic writing. Dr Nicholas Khoo has had to work hard to make me understand the importance of a compelling research question to pursue good research apart from grilling my drafts. My undisciplined mind had struggled to comprehend both initially.

To what extent they have succeeded in their endeavours is for them to decide, but I am extremely grateful for their patience and help offered to me throughout the course of writing this dissertation. My supervisor’s kind help in making me understand the demands and rigor of academic research has helped me in completing this dissertation. It has also helped in improving my skills in academic writing. Today my resolve to pursue academic research is more than ever. Sincere thanks to Prof. Nel and Dr. Khoo.

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## List of Abbreviations

**ADS** - Air Defence Ship  
**ARF** - ASEAN Regional Forum  
**ASEAN** - Association of South East Asian Nations  
**BJP** - Bhartiya Janta Party  
**CNS** - Chief of Naval Staff  
**EAS** - East Asian Summit  
**EEZs** - Exclusive Economic Zones  
**EU** - European Union  
**FENC** - Far Eastern Naval Command  
**FTA** - Free Trade Agreement  
**IISS** - International Institute for Strategic Studies  
**IPKF** - Indian Peace Keeping Force  
**IR**- International Relations-  
**LAC** - Line of Actual Control  
**LEP** - Look East Policy  
**LPD** - Landing Platform Dock  
**NAFTA** – North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement  
**NAM** - Non Alignment Movement  
**SCS** - South China Sea  
**SLOCs** - Sea Lanes of Communications  
**UN** – United Nation  
**US** – United States  
**VSTOL**- Vertical and Short Take-Off and Landing

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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In this dissertation I examine the role of India's external identity, and its aspirations for a new identity in international politics – the identity of an Asia-Pacific player - on its emerging naval power.

This subject is worth studying for the following reasons. India's economic rise has transformed its self-image<sup>1</sup> and ignited its aspirations to expand its strategic space in global politics. This quest for a larger strategic space is visible in different aspects of its foreign policy – political, economic and strategic. But the most significant impact of India's quest for a larger strategic space is evident in its expansive maritime strategy.

India has the world's fourth largest military, fifth largest navy and one of the biggest defence budgets. During the last decade it has embarked upon a major naval modernization program. With a defence budget of US \$30 billion, the navy's share has increased from 11.2 percent in 1992-93 to 19 percent in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, among the three services, the navy is the only service which invests significantly in procuring future capabilities. India has plans to spend \$45 billion over 20 years on sea power – 103 new warships, including destroyers and nuclear submarines.<sup>3</sup> India's shopping list of aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and long-range aircraft is intended to transform India into a formidable naval force. This will have wide ramifications for regional and international security.

There are many compelling reasons for India to build a strong navy. This dissertation examines the role of identity on the Indian state's emerging maritime consciousness and enthusiasm towards naval power (1991-2013). This research question emanates from the debate between the role of material factors and ideational factors in explaining the rise of Indian naval power. The proponents of material factors argue that the primary determinant of the Indian state's new-found maritime consciousness is rooted in material resources and structural position.<sup>4</sup> The causal power of ideas in precipitating a new maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elite is under examined. This study aims to rectify this

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars are of the opinion that the post Cold War revolution in Indian strategic thinking and its subsequent economic growth has transformed its self image. See C Raja Mohan, "India's Foreign Policy Transformation" *Asia policy*, number 14 (July 2012), 107–32 Available online at <http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=600#.UhcADrtHIYI>

<sup>2</sup> Harsh Pant, "India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities", *Pacific Affairs*; 2009, 82, 2, p 279

<sup>3</sup> Mark Colvin, *India: 21st-century sea power*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, (2011). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/907220519?accountid=14700>

<sup>4</sup> International Relations scholars of realist inclinations, most notably Kenneth Waltz, contend that lesser powers tend to band together to counterbalance the rise of a new, potentially dominant great power. The Indian proponents of structural realism assert that India's growing naval power is an act of balancing against a rising China. For an overview of realist analysis see Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics." *International Security* 18, no. 2, Fall 1993: pp 44-79

shortcoming by examining the role of ideational factors (related to identity) in unlocking the Indian strategic elite's historical sea-blindness.

There is a more compelling reason to explore the role of ideational factors in unlocking the true potential of India's naval power. Many prominent Indian naval thinkers and security analysts acknowledge that the Indian political elite suffered from an ideational blockage towards the application of the navy in India's grand strategy.<sup>5</sup> Yet they seek to explain the new found maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic community from the perspective of material factors.<sup>6</sup> The role of ideas in precipitating the change towards naval power is under examined.

Ideas have many sources, and scholars of international relations increasingly agree that strategic culture and identity are two important sources of ideas that can influence a state's external behaviour.<sup>7</sup> There have been attempts at explaining the growth of Indian naval power through the rationale of strategic culture.<sup>8</sup> This study examines the role of identity, and aspirations of a new identity, as the key driver of India's emerging maritime consciousness. It argues that identity, and the search for a new identity, are a source of ideas, norms, and other inter-subjective factors responsible for unlocking the traditional sea-blindness of the Indian strategic elite.

Scholars of international relations define identity as "a property of international actors that generates motivational dispositions."<sup>9</sup> That is to say identity is considered the basis of national interest that is assumed to underpin state behaviour in the international system. Scholars concur that identity create state behaviour because it manifests itself in the ongoing habits and practices of a state's foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> The identity that the Indian state aspires to is the identity of becoming an "Asia-Pacific player" as against its existing identity of being a "South Asian power (See Fig. 1)."<sup>11</sup> This thesis argues that the shift in India's self

<sup>5</sup> Many analysts are of the opinion that the Indian strategic elite suffered from an historical myopia towards the efficacy of naval power in national security planning. See C Uday Bhaskar, "Crucial maritime Space" *Hindu*, September 16, 2008. Online, available at

<http://www.hindu.com/br/2008/09/16/stories/2008091650061500.htm>, Admiral Arun Prakash, "Maritime Challenges" *Indian Defence Review* 21 no. 1, January 2006, pp. 49-52,

<sup>6</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, one such analyst, seeks to explain the eradication of ideational blockage on naval power by material factors such as globalization and new maritime security threats. See Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power", in *India's Contemporary Security Challenges*, edited by Michael Kugelman, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, D.C, 2011, Available at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA\\_100423\\_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA_100423_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf), Admiral Arun Prakash a former Indian chief of naval staff and chairman of the Chief of Staff's Committee.

<sup>7</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*,

<sup>8</sup> R. U. Zaman, *Strategic culture and the rise of the Indian Navy*, (2007), (Order No. U237573, The University of Reading (United Kingdom)). *PQDT - UK & Ireland*, Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/301700769?accountid=14700>. (301700769).

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999),

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey W. Legro, "The Plasticity of Identity under Anarchy," *European Journal of International Relations* 2009 15: 37,

<sup>11</sup> India's geographical situation within South Asian sub-continent on top of the Indian Ocean has formed the basis of India's self identification as a South Asia Power. Geographically India is not part of the region that is

identification as an Asia-Pacific player is the source of ideational changes responsible for an emerging maritime consciousness among its political elite.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1: Map of South East Asia**



Source: ([http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map\\_of\\_southeast\\_asia.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map_of_southeast_asia.htm))

This study is also important, as on previous many occasions the accumulation of naval power by states of similar aggregate national power and great power ambitions, has precipitated insecurity and global wars. The rise of naval powers like Germany, Japan, and the United States in the twentieth century had a profound impact on the global balance of power. The accrual of naval power by states inadvertently accompanies a desire to project hard power and influence into distant regions. It is a manifestation of a state's geopolitical ambitions. More so in India's case as it is a clear beneficiary of a benign maritime environment<sup>13</sup>, it's rising maritime ambitions reflecting India's desire to control its environment. In this regard it is worth noting that Indians are returning to nautical space after more than seven hundred years of self imposed *sabbatical*. There is a compelling reason to investigate India's new-found propensity towards sea power.

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connected to Western Pacific Ocean, therefore traditionally it has not been considered as an Asia-Pacific player. It is only in last two decades that India is attempting to bridge this geographical gap through its political, strategic, and diplomatic engagement with the region, which is constructing its new self-image.

<sup>12</sup> This argument is placed in the chapter four of this dissertation.

<sup>13</sup> James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty First Century*, London, Routledge, 2009.

## 1.1 Methodology

This study is a qualitative study with a focus on content and discourse analysis. It involves analytic interpretation of state behaviour as manifested in a collection of related texts, elite speeches, policy documents, newspaper articles and other evidence discernible in state behaviour. The content and discourse analysis is also helpful in explaining India's identity formation, and its contestation within the group claiming the collective identity of Asia-Pacific player. It also resorts to the use of case studies in explaining the Indian strategic elite's application of naval power in the service of India's grand strategy. The study draws on an analytic interpretation of empirical evidence and is informed by theory to support the claims made in the thesis.

## 1.2 Theoretical Approach

This study is informed by the theory of constructivism in explaining the rise of the Indian navy. Constructivism primarily seeks to demonstrate how core concepts of international relations are socially constructed, and not determined by material resources and structural positions. As Alexander Wendt is the best known advocate of social constructivism in the field of international relations, this study is informed by Wendt's theoretical framework of role of identity in international politics. But this study deviates from Wendt's stated aversion to 'power politics' and emphasis that 'power politics' is socially constructed and hence capable of being transformed by human practice. This study is more informed by what many constructivist scholars call 'constructivist realism'. Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon delineate "constructivist realism" – as a realism that takes norms and ideas seriously as objects of analysis.<sup>14</sup> This study makes an unmistakable emphasis on the role of norms and ideas (related to identity) in pursuance of power in international politics. The Indian state's pursuance of naval power is both a factor and an outcome of its new identity formation process.

## 1.3 Dissertation Plan

This dissertation consists of five chapters (including this introduction) which investigate the key question: What is the role of India's changing identity as an Asia-Pacific player in its current (1991-2013) naval growth? The second chapter, **Evolution of India's Maritime Thought: The Role of the Navy in National Security (1947-1991)**, surveys the historical evolution of Indian maritime thought, and the role of the navy in India's national security matrix from 1947 to 1991. The chapter sets the debate between the role of material and

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, "Constructivist Realism or Realist-Constructivism?" *International Studies Review*, 2004, 6, 337–352

ideational constraints on the historical development of India's naval power. It concludes that, along with the material limitations of the Indian state, there was some distinct observable ideational blockage that restricted the realization of the full potential of naval power in the service of India's grand strategy. The third chapter, **The Post Cold War Rise of the Indian Navy: 1991-2013**, presents an overview and critique of India's growing naval power after the end of the Cold War. The chapter questions the strategic rationale of the Indian state's growing enthusiasm towards naval power.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three collectively present the role of material and ideational factors in the application of, or restriction on, naval power in India's grand strategy. A few case studies are analysed in both the chapters to identify the role of ideational factors on the Indian political elite's changing enthusiasm towards naval power. These chapters raise the question about a possible role of India's external identity in international politics for explaining the emerging maritime consciousness among its strategic elites.

The fourth chapter, **From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Changing Identity**, makes the central argument of this dissertation that India's identity is changing from a South Asian power to an Asia-Pacific player. It argues that identity is the right variable to describe India's emergence as an Asia-Pacific player. The chapter exfoliates the meaning and content of India's self identification as a South Asian power during the Cold War in international politics. It examines the basis of India's search for a new identity in the wider Asia-Pacific region and construes India's new identity formation process. The chapter establishes that India's aspirations to become an Asia-Pacific player have been at the centre of many pragmatic changes in India's strategic behaviour.

The fifth and the last chapter of this dissertation, **Implications and Conclusion**, is in two parts. The first part presents the strategic implications of India's changing identity from a South Asian power to an Asia-Pacific player. It concludes that the Indian strategic elite's newfound enthusiasm for naval power is an attribute of its changing external identity. Developing strong navies is a fundamental feature of the collective group identity of the Asia-Pacific region, and India's new found enthusiasm towards naval power is a reflection of this normative feature associated with this identity. This explains the question raised in the third chapter of this dissertation about the strategic rationale of India's growing naval power. The second part of this chapter is a conclusion of this dissertation. It aims to integrate various aspects of this thesis ranging from stating the research problem, the Indian strategic elite's ideational blockage towards naval power, current Indian naval growth and its plausible explanation in the literature, and the central argument made in this dissertation.

This dissertation is driven by the single aim of exploring the role of ideas and inter-subjective factors related to India's external identity in explaining its enthusiasm towards naval power. To this end it offers a critique of the shortcomings in the existing explanations in the literature that are based on the role of material factors and strategic rationale. It makes a contribution to the existing literature, and accentuates that India's desire for the new identity of an Asia-Pacific player is another source that is fuelling the Indian maritime consciousness.

## Chapter 2: Evolution of India's Maritime Thought: The Role of the Navy in National Security (1947-1991)

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The Indian state's perception about the role of naval power in its national security has evolved over time. Despite a peninsular geography, a long coastline of 7526.6 km, and a scattered island territory along the Indian Ocean, Indians have long been accused of having a continental security mindset. This perception has been perpetuated because of the dominance of the army in shaping Indian defence policy, and the perceived absence of any naval threat to India.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, India has over time created a middle sized navy, with several principal naval combatants, which have included at times the successful simultaneous operation of two aircraft carriers, *INS Vikrant* and *INS Virat*, along its maritime domain – an accomplishment not yet matched by any other Asian navy. It is unlikely that such a significant naval force would exist without any intellectual foundation and political direction.

This chapter surveys the historical evolution of Indian maritime thought and the role of the navy in India's national security matrix from 1947 to 1991. The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first part presents the intellectual foundation and political rhetoric around the role of naval power in Indian security thinking. The second part presents an overview of the navy's actual role in the practice of national security, broadly conceived. The third part explores the plausible causes of the relative neglect of naval power in India's foreign security calculations during this period. It concludes by advancing an additional explanation of India's relative neglect of naval power (in addition to existing explanations in the literature) that relates to its identity as a "South Asian Power" during this period.

### 2.1 Sea Power in Indian Strategic Thinking

The Indian Navy had a modest beginning at the time of independence in 1947 and inherited a single British aircraft carrier, two old cruisers and eight new frigates from outgoing Great Britain.<sup>16</sup> The navy had always nurtured a lofty vision of itself as a blue-water force at some future point in time, but this vision was initially shared by neither the politicians nor the

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<sup>15</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, The role of the navy in Indian security policy, *Contemporary South Asia*, (1993) 2:2, 151-164

<sup>16</sup> Vice Admiral GM Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph, History of the Indian Navy, 1965-1975* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999), 3-11.

bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless Indian strategic thinking had occasional references of the importance of naval power in India's grand strategy.

Kavalam Panikkar, historian and diplomat, was the most prominent figure advocating a forward Indian naval presence in the Indian Ocean. His work, *An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (1945) is treated as foremost Indian thinking on naval power. He was influenced by Alfred Mahan's classic work on sea power, *The Influences of Sea Power upon History* (1890).<sup>18</sup> In tandem with Mahan's projection of sea power, Panikkar also envisaged a forward naval policy based on acquiring distant naval bases in the Indian Ocean with the aim of securing India. Panikkar's legacy is widely felt in the Indian navy's 'blue water ambitions', as its officers in training still (2005) read his book.<sup>19</sup>

Acknowledging Mahan's view of the dominant role of sea power<sup>20</sup> in world history, Panikkar applied it to India's strategic settings and argued for an 'oceanic policy' as a crucial dimension of forward strategic planning. According to Panikkar's Oceanic Policy:

"a steel ring can be created around India . . . within the area so ringed, a navy can be created strong enough to defend its home-waters, then the waters vital to India's security and prosperity can be protected . . . with the islands of the Bay of Bengal, with Singapore, Mauritius and Socotra properly equipped and protected and, with a navy based on Ceylon, security can return to that part of the Indian Ocean which is of supreme importance to India."<sup>21</sup>

Keshav Vaidya, another early Indian naval enthusiast, also expressed sweeping maritime ambitions for the newly independent Indian state. Though less influential than Panikkar, Vaidya's work was also inspired by the Mahanian classic concept of sea control and power projection. For Vaidya, the Indian Navy was to be expanded, "developing an invincible navy . . . to defend not only her coast but her distant oceanic frontiers with her own navy."<sup>22</sup>

The intellectual foundation for the notion of robust sea power was equally accompanied by political rhetoric in New Delhi. Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who had a profound

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<sup>17</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power", in *India's Contemporary Security Challenges*, edited by Michael Kugelman, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, D.C, 2011, Available at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA\\_100423\\_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA_100423_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf), Admiral Arun Prakash a former Indian Chief of Naval Staff and chairman of the Chief of Staff's Committee.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Mahan, "The Influences of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783," Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1890,

<sup>19</sup> P. Brobst, *The Future of the Great Game. Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence, and the Defence of Asia* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2005), pp 26-30, Cited by, David Scott, 'India's "Grand Strategy" for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2006, 13:2, 97-129

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Mahan's concept of sea power was based on the idea that countries with the strongest naval power will have greater worldwide impact. The concept had an enormous influence in shaping the strategic thought of navies across the world. See Alfred Mahan, "The Influences of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783"

<sup>21</sup> K. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean. An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945), 12.

<sup>22</sup> K. Vaidya, *The Naval Defence of India* (Bombay: Thacker, 1949), pp 9,

impact on India's foreign security policy and strategic world views, also emphasised India's maritime geography, though he did not single out the development of maritime power as a national priority. For Nehru, the navy should be small but flexible, highly trained, and capable of expansion when the time comes.<sup>23</sup> Nehru's indifference towards maritime power was less due to negligence of sea power, and more due to his aversion to war in international politics, and his belief in the limitation of military means in maximising the state security.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Nehru was very much aware of India's maritime geography and the geopolitical value of the Indian Ocean, and demanded a permanent United Nations (UN) Security Council seat for India on the basis of the future potential of India's maritime geography.<sup>25</sup>

Sardar Patel, the first Deputy Prime Minister, and an influential figure among the post-independent Indian political elite, was more unequivocal in his support for naval power. Patel asserted that "the geographical position and features of India make it inevitable for India to have . . . a strong navy to guard its long coastline and to keep a constant vigil on the vast expanse of the sea that surrounds us."<sup>26</sup>

The intellectual consensus within the Indian state for robust naval power was self evident.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 The Role of the Navy in Indian Security (1947-1991)

Though the navy had a modest beginning in 1947, "yet for a newly independent nation, it was not an insignificant force."<sup>28</sup> Initially the navy's role was envisioned in the British Commonwealth matrix,<sup>29</sup> and India's first Chief of Naval Staff, within ten days of

<sup>23</sup> Nehru to Baldev Singh, 10 May 1950, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. 2nd ser. Vol.14 Part 2 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1993), 280-283, 283. Cited by, David Scott, 'India's "Grand Strategy" for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2006, 13:2, 97-129

<sup>24</sup> For Nehru's view on India's security and the limited role of military force in preventing the external conflict see Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press U.S.A., 2001), pp. 57—87. Also see Kanti Bajpai, "Indian Strategic Culture" in *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, Edited by Michael R. Chambers November 2002

<sup>25</sup> See J. Nehru, "India and the Membership of the Security Council," 30 October 1946, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Second Series. Vol.1 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), ed. S. Gopal, 464—66, 464.

<sup>26</sup> S. Patel, 20 November 1948, cited by K. Vaidya, *The Naval Defence of India*, (Bombay: Thacker, 1949), front page.

<sup>27</sup> Experts note that though there was an intellectual consensus in newly independent India about the need for a strong naval power, yet it was confined to political rhetoric and could not be translated into policy action for developing a robust navy. See Harsh pant, "India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities" *Pacific Affairs* Summer 2009; 82, 2; ProQuest Central pg. 279, Also See David Scott, 'India's "Grand Strategy" for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2006, 13:2, 97-129

<sup>28</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power",

<sup>29</sup> Vice Admiral GM Hiranandani, *Transition to Triumph, History of the Indian Navy, 1965-1975* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999), 3-11.

independence, submitted a 10-year plan for naval expansion to bring India “to a position of pre-eminence and leadership among the nations of South-east Asia.”<sup>30</sup>

Gradually, with India’s proclamation of republic status and pursuit of an independent non-aligned foreign policy in international politics, the navy’s potential role in India’s strategic calculus was transformed. The navy’s strategic significance was made commensurate with the amount of naval threat faced by India, which was almost non-existent. As a consequence, during the first twenty years of India’s independence, the navy received around 7% of the defence budget. In the first three years of India’s independence (1948-51), the naval budget hovered around 4.7-4.8 percent of the total defence allocation, rising to a high of 10.1 percent in 1955-57, and then slipping to 7.9 percent in 1961-62.<sup>31</sup>

Even operationally, the navy’s role in India’s post-independent military operations was limited. The navy did not take part in the conflicts of 1948 (Indo-Pakistan), 1962 (Indo-China) and 1965 (Indo-Pakistan). In the 1965 Indo-Pakistan conflict, the Indian navy faced major embarrassment when it failed to prevent a minor, yet successful, Pakistani naval bombardment of the Indian coastal town of Dwarka. The only significant military operation undertaken by the navy in the first two decades of India’s independence was the December 1961 liberation of Portuguese territory (Goa) in India.

India’s navy continued to be the junior partner of the Indian army and had a limited role in overall national defence planning. India’s naval weakness was evident in the 1960s as it suffered from political neglect and this period is regarded as being “a troubled period for the navy.”<sup>32</sup> Even worse, the Indian Navy was not even Indian-led. The first decade of independence saw “British” Chiefs of Naval Staff, i.e. John Hall (1947–48), William Parry (1948–51), Mark Pizey (1951– 56) and Stephen Carlill (1956–58) as leaders.<sup>33</sup> The Indian Navy got its first ‘Indian’ leadership only in August 1958, 11 years after independence, with the appointment of Ram Das Khatri as the Chief of Naval Staff.

It was only in the late 1960s, when the entire Indian defence system was overhauled as a consequence of the humiliating defeat by China in 1962, that the navy received the attention of the Indian government. A limited naval expansion was conceived and a long term indigenous ship building program was proposed.<sup>34</sup> This period also coincided with India’s budding relationship with the Soviet Union, which contrasted with a general reticence of Great Britain and the United States in granting India access to high technology weapons. The

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<sup>30</sup> J. Hall, “Outline Plan for Reorganisation and Development of the Royal Indian Navy,” 25 August 1947, cited by Rahul Roy Chaudhury, *Sea-Power and India’s Security*, 27. (London: Brassey’s, 1995),

<sup>31</sup> Figures from Rahul Roy Chaudhury, *Sea Power and Indian Security*, Table 7.2, 187–188.

<sup>32</sup> Rahul Roy Chaudhury, *Sea-Power and India’s Security*, p 57.

<sup>33</sup> David Scott, ‘India’s “Grand Strategy” for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions’, *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2006, 13:2, 97-129

<sup>34</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, “The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy,” *Contemporary South Asia*, (1993) 2:2, 151-164

Indian navy, therefore, ordered and received eight Osa I-class missile boats from the former Soviet Union.

The navy's operational success during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war increased the credibility of and faith in the Indian navy's combat abilities. Led by naval staff, which was determined to rewrite the humiliation meted out to them in the previous 1965 conflict with Pakistan, the Indian navy successfully "established complete command of the sea in the east, and probably effective command in the west".<sup>35</sup> Pakistan's maritime trade was brought to a complete halt while Indian shipping continued as normal. The blockade of Chittagong in the Bay of Bengal, prevented the transfer of Pakistani military personnel to West Pakistan, and helped bring the war to an early end. It was a case of classic Mahanian sea power at its best. Even the "Soviet Union's 'Mahan', Admiral Gorshkov, was impressed by India's successful naval missile attacks on Karachi, and later praised it in his own classic work *The Sea Power of the State* (1979)."<sup>36</sup>

While the success of the 1971 naval operation demonstrated the navy's combat prowess and clear naval superiority over India's traditional rival Pakistan, it nevertheless failed to enhance the strategic significance of the navy in India's national security system. India's naval budget continued to hover around a low 8.8 percent of its defence budget in the next decade from 1971-72 to 1979-1980. There was a clear gap between the navy's ambitions and the government's perception about naval power. Ashley Tellis notes that "if the Indian Navy seriously contemplates power projection mission in the Indian Ocean, such a fleet is inadequate . . . it has neither the balance nor the required offensive punch to maintain zones of influence".<sup>37</sup>

It was in the period between 1980 and 1991 that India's strong alignment with the Soviet Union resulted in a windfall of hardware for the Indian Navy.<sup>38</sup> The Navy's major acquisitions included, among other items, an aircraft carrier, twenty-seven ship-borne vertical and short take-off and landing (VSTOL) fighters, five guided-missile destroyers, twelve diesel submarines, nine missile corvettes, five maritime reconnaissance aircraft, and a nuclear attack submarine on lease.<sup>39</sup> Coinciding with a new and strategically assertive Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, at the helm of affairs, the Indian navy at long last received its moments of relative significance within the national security system.

India's naval budget rose from a low share of 8 percent in early 1980s to 12.5 percent in 1985-86. In 1987, the newly purchased aircraft carrier *INS Virat* became operational, thus making the Indian navy the only Asian navy with two aircraft carriers, one each for its western and eastern flanks. During this period the navy was assigned two operational tasks

<sup>35</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1971-72* (1972), p 52, cited by Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy," *Contemporary South Asia*, (1993) 2:2, 151-164

<sup>36</sup> David Scott, 'India's "Grand Strategy" for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 2006, 13:2, 97-129

<sup>37</sup> A Tellis, "Demanding Tasks for the Indian Navy," *Asian Survey*, 25.12, December 1985, 1186-1213, 1190.

<sup>38</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power",

<sup>39</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power",

related to India's foreign policy goals rather than coastal security – the operation in Sri Lanka (1987) and the Maldives (1988). While in Sri Lanka, the navy's role was primarily limited to transportation and logistic support of the military contingent, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), operating on the ground. It was in the Maldives that the navy had a combat role of military intervention for regime protection from a local coup. The mission was successful as the mercenaries were apprehended with minimum use of force and India's friendly regime was reinstated in the Maldives.

Notwithstanding the increased attention devoted to naval operations and expanded naval procurement during the 1980s, the navy's relative strategic significance within the overall national security complex continued to be low. The navy continued to be the Cinderella service of India's security services. Experts saw the previous talk of naval modernisation as having been much-publicised, often exaggerated and overtaken by reduced supplies and spending.<sup>40</sup> Some others noted that "India's fleet improvements had long ceased and that the navy's function appeared almost forgotten."<sup>41</sup>

## 2.3 Plausible explanations of the relative neglect experienced by the Indian Navy

The preceding section raises the obvious question: what accounts for the continued relative neglect of naval power, despite the successes and expansion of the navy in the preceding years? Notwithstanding the intellectual consensus on the importance of maritime power, the Indian political elite continued to refrain from launching a large-scale naval expansion. To some extent there was a visible reluctance on the part of the Indian political elite in exploiting the navy's full potential in national defence. What explains the indifference towards naval power? The adherents of positivist approaches of International Relations (IR) theory emphasize the absence of maritime "interests" to necessitate a strong naval power. According to this view, as maritime trade was an insignificant aspect of the Indian economy given its closed nature, the Indian state had no incentive to develop a strong navy. Also related to this explanation were the factors of the Indian state's limited material capacity, and the virtual non-existence of any major naval threat to its security.

There is nothing insubstantial in this explanation except that it assumes that "interests" are given in nature, and completely denies the alternative constructivist explanation that "interests" are socially constructed. Constructivists argue that in a socially constructed world "interests" are socially constructed by social practices which mutually constitute actors and

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<sup>40</sup> Rahul Roy Chaudhury, "The Limits to Naval Expansion," Bajpai and Mattoo, eds. *Securing India. Strategic Thought and Practice*, 191–200, 191,

<sup>41</sup> A. Chandy, "China Naval Power," K. Bajpai and A. Mattoo, eds., *The Peacock and the Dragon. India-China Relations in the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2000), 76–102, 95–96.

structure.<sup>42</sup> In light of this alternative explanation, there is a need to reassess plausible causes of the Indian political elite's relative neglect of naval power during this period. To accomplish this task this section will first explicate the meaning of "interests" inherent in the existing explanation, followed by a constructivist explanation of cause of neglect of naval power by the Indian state.

The primary emphasis of existing rationalist explanation of Indian naval power is on the virtual absence of any significant maritime trade during this period to incentivise the Indian political elite to develop their naval power. This explanation assumes that the presence or absence of maritime trade is the primary reason for the strategic significance of the navy in the Indian state's strategic calculations. It seems that this assumption emanates from the traditional view of sea power (not naval power),<sup>43</sup> which posits that merchant shipping is both a source of maritime power and something that navies naturally need to defend. According to this traditional view of sea power the maritime economy is very important for the development of sea power in general, and naval power in particular. Sea power can best be represented as a tight and inseparable system in which naval power protects the maritime assets that are the ultimate source of its effectiveness.<sup>44</sup>

This is essentially a European approach to sea power where successive European powers of the seventeenth century had discovered a huge advantage to be derived from close association between the military and the mercantile aspect of sea power. The maritime trade resulted in mercantile finance which could be used to fund naval effort. History shows that successive European powers, the Venetians, the Dutch, the British and, to some extent, the Portuguese, Spanish and French, were able to derive resources from their respective maritime trade and divert it for naval purposes whenever the need arose. This traditional view of sea power presumes a strong representation and influence of the trading and seafaring merchant community on a state's strategic decision making to build strong navies to protect their sea based mercantile interests.<sup>45</sup>

To apply this traditional view of sea power in explaining the twentieth century Indian state's interest in naval power may be a case of over-simplification. It is important to analyze further if the presence (or absence) of maritime trade was responsible for the Indian political elite's

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Keohane calls the failure to contextualize interests one of the major weaknesses of mainstream international relations theory. Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1988), pp. 390-391. Cited by Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security*, Volume 23, Number 1, Summer 1998, pp. 171-200

<sup>43</sup> It is important to note that sea power is a broader concept than naval power, and naval power is one essential part of sea power.

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey Till, "The Sea and Sea Power" in *Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty first Century*, Franc Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp 18

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Till summarises the central argument of the traditional view of sea power. Lately this argument has been developed further to explain the virtuous maritime circle between maritime trade, mercantile finance, government and navies. See Peter Padfield, *Maritime Supremacy and the Opening of the Western Mind* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook Press), 1999, Richard Harding, *Sea Power and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (London: University College Press), 1999

perception of its naval power. In this regard two points need further clarification. First, to what extent is India's merchant shipping integrated with its naval power? Second, are Indian merchant shipping and the navy intricately linked as an inseparable system where the navy visualises merchant shipping as the ultimate source of its own effectiveness. That is to say, does the Indian navy depend on the mercantile finance for its own budgetary allocations and strategic relevance?

In this regard Geoffrey Till comments, "In India, relations between the navy and the merchant marine are close, but maritime specialists worry that neither gets the attention it deserves."<sup>46</sup> This is primarily due to the relative insignificance of a notion of sea power among the Indian foreign security elite. In the absence of any holistic appreciation of sea power, there is a lack of integration between the military and non-military components of sea power. Even against the wishful thinking of many in the Indian strategic community, sea power is considered an evolving concept in Indian strategic thinking, where emphasis is purely on the military component of sea power, rather than the non-military component. The navy functions within the Ministry of Defence, where military officials are further given a narrow perimeter to develop a mechanism of cooperation, with little latitude to go beyond the scope allotted by civilian officials.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, maritime trade and merchant shipping has not evolved as a non-military component of sea power in Indian strategic thinking. They are essentially a component of the nation's economic power rather than sea power. India's navy and maritime trading systems are still not intricately linked as in the nineteenth century European powers, where the navy visualized the trading system as the ultimate source of its own effectiveness, and was zealously driven for its defence. The Indian Navy's strategic relevance is dependent more on the latitude of the political objective of its foreign security elite and less dependent on its increasing maritime trade.

Naval power and maritime trade are two different compartments, like many others, of India's national security. Indian strategic thinking, at best, has been less successful in integrating the different compartments of national security into holistic security goals. As India's Union Minister for Finance, P. Chidambaram (2013) noted, "Until recently, we have taken a very compartmentalized view of national security. Each threat to national security was neatly fitted into one compartment."<sup>48</sup> In the light of the above analysis, the argument that the absence or presence of maritime trade is a key determinant in the Indian political elite's perception of its naval power, is over emphasized. India's case is not an ideal fit for the traditional view of sea power, prevalent in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century European naval powers where powerful navies emerged to protect their far flung maritime trade.

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<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Till, "The Constituents of Sea Power" in *Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty first Century*, Franc Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp 98

<sup>47</sup> Colin Geraghty, "India in the Indian Ocean Region: Re-calibrating U.S. Expectations", American Security Project. Available at <http://americansecurityproject.org/featured-items/2012/india-in-the-indian-ocean-region-re-calibrating-u-s-expectations/>

<sup>48</sup> P Chidambaram, speech on K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Lecture on "National Security – Challenges and Priorities" February 6, 2013, Available at <http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/IndiasNationalSecurityChallengesandPriorities>

Other reasons advanced in defence of this prevailing indifference towards naval power in New Delhi are its limited material capacity and absence of naval threats. Proponents of resource-realism argue that material constraints were the primary cause of the limited growth of India's naval power during this period. According to this view any state would have to have a critical mass of material resources in order to assert itself as a significant actor.<sup>49</sup> Given India's acute resource scarcity from 1947 to 1991 owing to its sluggish economic growth and the exigencies of security threats emanating from its northern continental land mass, it was very unlikely that the expansion of naval power would become a priority. Rahul Roy Chaudhury asserts that the limited funding of the navy was due to the army's dominance over the defence policy, and the absence of a naval threat to Indian security.<sup>50</sup> The persistent security threats from Pakistan and China towards its northern frontiers has kept the Indian political elite historically sea blind.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.4 The Role of Identity in India's National Continental Mindset

Nothing in the preceding analysis aims to suggest that the presence or absence of maritime trade is an insignificant factor in development of a state's naval power. Rather the intention is to suggest that it is not the only factor effecting the development of naval power. There can be many motivational dispositions for states to develop their respective naval power. Historically many states have developed their navies purely for the purpose of strategic domination or even for inter-subjective factors such as recognition.<sup>52</sup> In India's context, the indifference towards the navy was not limited to naval armament; instead it was apparent even in the application of available naval resources in the pursuit of national security.

In the 1961 Goa operation which involved the combined actions of the army, navy, and air force, the navy played an active role in the operation and imposed seaward pressure on the enemy and grounded the spirited defence of a Portuguese sloop, *Alfonso de Albuquerque*. The

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<sup>49</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, ([1948] 1960) 3rd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

<sup>50</sup> Chaudhury notes that "the threats emanating from Pakistan and China, and the nature of military operations since independence perpetuated the historical supremacy of the army *vis-a-vis* the other two services." See Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy," Also See N. Palmer, "South Asia and the Indian Ocean," in A. Cottrell, and R. Burrell, eds., *The Indian Ocean: Its Political, Economic, and Military Importance*, (New York, Praeger, 1972), p.237

<sup>51</sup> C Uday Bhaskar, "Crucial Maritime Space" Hindu, September 16, 2008. Online, available at <http://www.hindu.com/br/2008/09/16/stories/2008091650061500.htm>, Also See Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The role of the navy in Indian security policy,"

<sup>52</sup> Scholars are of the opinion that many powers such as the sixteenth-seventeenth century Portuguese and French, and the twentieth century Soviet navy were driven by the motivation of strategic domination rather than of defending or protecting their maritime trade. Similarly some scholars have argued that the nineteenth century German navy was a case of a pursuit of recognition of a great power. See Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War," *Security Studies*, 2010, 19:4, 656-88,

army took the major credit for the liberation of Goa.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, notwithstanding Indian naval superiority over Pakistan, the navy was given a very limited mandate by the Indian political elite. The government restricted all naval operations to within two hundred miles of Bombay, or south of the parallel of Porbander, along the western flank.<sup>54</sup> The then Chief of Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral B. S. Soman, was forbidden to initiate any offensive action against Pakistani forces at sea or operate beyond the given range, except in pursuit of Pakistani naval ships.<sup>55</sup> The result was obvious. A minor, yet embarrassing failure to prevent the naval bombardment of an Indian coastal town. Even worse, the general atmosphere in the Indian security matrix remained pessimistic for the navy as the army's advocates like Major-General D.K. Palit (1969) denounced the navy's expansion and projection into the Indian Ocean as 'outmoded Imperial concepts'.<sup>56</sup>

The realist's logic holds less ground in explaining the Indian political elite's relative neglect of naval power, as it presumes that "interests" are a given in nature, and have a firm material basis in the formation of those interests. It is argued here that interests are not necessarily determined by material resources and the structural position of states. These factors may be important in their own right, but interests are eventually shaped by the way in which decision makers think about their state and themselves, and how they interpret, value and judge material factors. Ideas, including those concerning identity, shape interests.

This fact (the role of ideas) is further corroborated by assertions of many prominent Indian naval thinkers and proponents of maritime power, who repeatedly bemoan the ideological constraint on the Indian political elite's perception of their naval power. They trace the origin of this ideological barrier from the continental mindset of the larger Indian society. Admiral Arun Prakash, one such prominent naval thinker, asserts that "an inherent cultural diffidence holds India back from assuming the mantle and responsibilities of a regional maritime power."<sup>57</sup> For him, Indian society suffers from 'collective amnesia' about its glorious maritime past, which shapes the traditional sea-blind attitude of the Indian political attitude. C. Uday Bhaskar, another Indian naval thinker, blames the national continental mindset of Indian society for shaping their political elite's sea blind attitude.<sup>58</sup> Though these scholars

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<sup>53</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy,"

<sup>54</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy,"

<sup>55</sup> Rear-Admiral Satyindra Singh (Retd), *Blueprint to Bluewater: The Indian Navy 1951-65* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1992), p 457. Cited by Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The Role of the Navy in Indian Security Policy,"

<sup>56</sup> D. Palit, "Outmoded Imperial Concepts," *Hindustan Times*, 27,29 December 1969, Cited by David Scott, 'India's Grand Strategy for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13/2 (2006), 97-129, at 109

<sup>57</sup> Arun Prakash, "Planning for Tomorrow's Navy," *Indian Defence Review*, February 02, 2012, Available online at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/interviews/planning-for-tomorrows-navy/>

<sup>58</sup> Uday Bhaskar asserts that "Perhaps this has to do with the national mindset that can only visualise India with the North Pole at the apex and hence the Himalayas loom large, while a whole oceanic expanse that the peninsula juts into gets relegated since it is far, far "south of the Vindhya" – and hence beyond the pale and comprehension of a parochial New Delhi." See C Uday Bhaskar, "Crucial maritime Space" *The Hindu*,

differ in their conception of the basis of this national continental mindset, the emphasis is clearly on ideological constraint on the navy's role in India's foreign security.

It is helpful to understand such an historical glitch (national continental mindset) through Alan K. Henrikson's concept of 'mental maps'.<sup>59</sup> This concept of mental maps supplies scholars with a novel way to appraise how statesmen and soldiers see, interpret and act on their political and strategic surroundings. Toshi Yoshihara, and his team of writers, in their work, *India's Naval Strategy in the Twenty First Century* (2007), has extended this concept of mental maps onto the maritime geography. They argue that "nation-states seldom manage to fuse the maritime and terrestrial components, developing a holistic view of their strategic geography."<sup>60</sup> According to them a continental society's mental map, in the absence of maritime consciousness, remains incomplete, in effect containing "blank" areas in place of the sea. For them, the Indian political elite suffered from this myopia towards maritime power, and the primary cause was rooted in their inability to grasp the full significance of its strategic geography.

In this regard constructivism, which posits that interests are the product of identity,<sup>61</sup> offers an additional resource to explain the Indian state's relative neglect of naval power. That is to say, India's identity as a "South Asian Power" during this period was also responsible for the absence of interest in its naval power. How the concept of identity operates in India's foreign security behavior will be explained later in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. What is important to note for the present context is the fact that India has successfully claimed and acted as a regional power of South Asia (thus consolidating its identity of a "South Asian Power") during this period.<sup>62</sup>

India's self-identification as a regional power of South Asia has a significant impact on the way its political elite perceive its strategic geography. The geography of South Asia consists of a vast land mass neatly cordoned by the Hindukush and the Himalayas in the north, and a small island (Sri Lanka) towards the south. That is to say that more than ninety percent of India's strategic geography is a land mass and, applying Henrikson's concept of 'mental maps' on this strategic-geography,<sup>63</sup> it becomes obvious that the ocean appears on the fringes

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September 16, 2008. Online, available at

<http://www.hindu.com/br/2008/09/16/stories/2008091650061500.htm>,

<sup>59</sup> Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers" *International Political Science Review* 1, no. 4, 1980: pp. 495-530. Also See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Maps as an 'Idea': The Role of Cartographic Imagery during the Second World War", *American Cartographer* 2, 1975: pp. 19-53, See Alan K. Henrikson, Distance and Foreign Policy: A Political Geography Approach" *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 4, 2002, pp. 437-466.

<sup>60</sup> James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009)

<sup>61</sup> Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,"

<sup>62</sup> It is important to point out that this identification of India as a "South Asia Power" is based on 'role' based analyses – a practise acknowledged in constructivist research program.

<sup>63</sup> Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers" *International Political Science Review* 1, no. 4, 1980: pp. 495-530. Also See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Maps as an 'Idea': The Role of Cartographic Imagery during the Second World War", *American Cartographer* 2, 1975: pp. 19-53, See

to Indian strategy makers. This asymmetry between land and ocean in India's strategic geography, explains the relative predominance of the army over the navy, and hence a continental mindset instead of a maritime consciousness.

Though the above analysis demonstrates the efficacy of ideas related to India's identity as a "South Asian Power", in explaining its political elite's indifference towards naval power during the period under review in this chapter, caution should be exercised in making any overstating claims. It is accentuated that this chapter offers identity as an additional explanation (not replacing existing explanations), for the Indian state's relative neglect of its naval power.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an historical evolution of Indian maritime thinking and has evaluated the role of the navy in Indian national security from 1947 to 1991. It has analysed the plausible causes of the relative neglect of naval power in India's foreign security calculations during this period. It concludes by advancing an additional explanation (in addition to existing explanations in the literature) of the Indian state's relative neglect of naval power that relates to its identity as a "South Asian Power" during this period.

This revelation raises an important question; does identity play an equally important role, (if any), in any other phase of Indian naval history? This question leads us to a more interesting and contemporary phase in the Indian state's naval history – the post Cold War phase – which is witnessing an unparalleled growth in India's naval ambition. The next chapter presents a brief survey of growth in Indian naval power before analysing the role of identity to explain the naval growth in the subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 3: The Post Cold War Rise of the Indian Navy: 1991-2013

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It is strange that the rise of India's naval power offers more excitement than poses a puzzle to scholars of international security. Traditionally Indian naval planners and the strategic community have bemoaned the sea blindness<sup>64</sup> of its foreign security elite.<sup>65</sup> In spite of this, the Indian state has demonstrated an unmistakable propensity towards naval power after the end of the Cold War. The period from 1991 to 2013 can easily be recognized as a period of unprecedented growth in India's naval power.

The reason why it generates excitement among security experts is its potential to influence the future regional balance of power. The reason why it does not appear a puzzle to scholars of international security is that it is widely assumed that there is a strategic rationale behind India's emerging maritime consciousness. Realists explain this phenomenon by the logic of 'strategic rationale' and the 'rise in material capabilities'. The reason why I believe that the rise of Indian naval power should pose a puzzle to scholars of international security is that it defies the logic of strategic rationale and rising material capabilities. There is a case to examine the basis of India's emerging maritime consciousness as an outcome of ideational factors along with other material factors.

This chapter has the modest aim of seeking explanations for the Indian state's emerging maritime consciousness. The chapter proceeds in two parts. The first part describes what constitutes growth in Indian naval power. It presents an overview of the navy's capability, accretion, doctrinal development, and diplomatic endeavours that suggest the rise of its strategic significance in India's security system. Some trends in the Indian state's application of naval power in the service of its grand strategy are identified. The second part seeks to find an explanation for this new emerging, and previously unseen, maritime consciousness among Indian strategy makers. It questions the strategic rationale offered in the literature to explain the rise of the navy. The causative effect of India's peninsular geography, the Indian Ocean, globalization, maritime trade, and balancing against a rising China, on India's emerging maritime consciousness, is examined. The chapter concludes that the rise in maritime consciousness of the Indian state is not convincingly explained by the different variants of realism. There is much more to a society's maritime consciousness than a mere rise in its relative material capabilities.

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<sup>64</sup> Experts define sea blindness as, "an inability to appreciate the central role the oceans and naval power play in securing strategic security and economic prosperity". See Bracknell, Butch; Kraska, James, "End U.S. 'Sea Blindness': The Law Of The Sea Convention Would Greatly Benefit America And Needs To Be Ratified", *The Baltimore Sun*, A.17, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> On the Indian elite's sea blindness See K. Kohli, "Maritime Power in Peace and War—an Indian View," *African Security Review*, 5.2, 1996,

### 3.1 The Indian Navy's Capability Accretion

Since the late 1990s, New Delhi has enunciated a naval modernization program through both foreign acquisitions and indigenous construction projects. The emphasis is on accruing capabilities for long range operations and extra regional power projection missions. Three key acquisitions of the Indian navy – aircraft carriers, long range aircraft and nuclear submarines – are intended to enhance India's long distance power projection capabilities. In support of this objective the navy's share of India's expanding defence budget has steadily risen from 11.2 percent in 1992–93 to 18.3 percent in 2007–08.<sup>66</sup> Their naval leaders have announced ambitious goals: that “by 2022, we plan to have a 160-plus ship navy, including three aircraft carriers, 60 major combatants including submarines, and close to 400 aircraft of different types.”<sup>67</sup>

The increase in the navy's budget, though, is in proportion to the general increase in India's defence budget, where the army still enjoys the lion's share, followed by the air force. In 2011-12 the navy's share of the total defence allocation was 18 percent, compared to 53.05 percent for the army, and 23.12 percent for the air force.<sup>68</sup> Yet it is the navy's share of capital expenditure that increases the strategic significance of even the seemingly small share of the naval budget. In any defence expenditure, the ratio of revenue to capital expenditure is an important gauge to assess the respective service's expenditure on future capabilities. While the ratio of revenue to capital expenditure for the Indian defence force as a whole has been 70: 30, for the navy the ratio is 48: 52.<sup>69</sup> Of the three services, the navy is the only one that is investing in future capabilities, to a greater extent than current expenditure.<sup>70</sup>

Indian naval planners have envisaged a three aircraft carrier fleet strategy. The aim is to ensure that two aircraft carriers will remain in the water all the time guarding India's western and eastern flanks, whereas the third one will be in dock for repair and replenishment. To this end, the newly purchased *Admiral Gorshkov*, rechristened *INS Vikramaditya*, will be joining *INS Viraat* by mid 2015.<sup>71</sup> This 44,500-ton capital ship, with a range of 14,000 nautical miles,

<sup>66</sup> James Hackett, ed., *The Military Balance, 2008* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008), p. 336.

<sup>67</sup> “Indian Navy Chief Admiral Suresh Mehta Spells Out Vision 2022,” *India Defence*, August 10, 2008. Available at <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/3954>.

<sup>68</sup> Annual Report, 2011-12, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, pp. 14. Report downloaded from <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?fecvnodeid=118574&dom=1&groupot593=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&fecvid=33&v21=127251&lng=en&v33=118574&ots627=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&id=155964>

<sup>69</sup> Harsh Pant, “India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities”, *Pacific Affairs*; 2009, 82, 2, p 279

<sup>70</sup> V. N. Srinivas, “Trends in Defence Expenditure,” *Air Power Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, (Spring 2006), pp. 64-73,

<sup>71</sup> The induction of *Admiral Gorshkov* has been long delayed due to cost overruns and technical delays at the Russian dockyard. The aircraft carrier was purchased from Russia in 2004 and its induction been postponed several times, the latest being proposed to be inducted in late 2013. See Rajat Pandit, “INS Vikrant unlikely to be battle-ready before 2020,” *The times of India*, August 12, 2013. Available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/INS-Vikrant-unlikely-to-be-battle-ready-before-2020/articleshow/21782393.cms>

three times the operational radius of the current *INS Viraat*, is destined to enhance India's strategic reach.<sup>72</sup> A third, indigenously built aircraft carrier to be known as the Air Defence Ship (ADS), *INS Vikrant*, was launched on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2013, and is scheduled on time (as of now in 2013) to become operational in 2018.<sup>73</sup> This marks India's entry into an elite group of four countries – US, UK, Russia, and France – that are capable of designing and building an equivalent size ship. In all likelihood, India's three aircraft carrier battle fleet will be operational by the mid 2020s.<sup>74</sup>

In April 2003, a new Delhi-class missile frigate, *INS Bhramaputra*, with its major high-technology components manufactured in India, was also launched. In the same year, the navy also took delivery from Russia of *INS Talwar* and *INS Trishul*, armed with sophisticated missile systems, followed in 2004 by *INS Tabar*. These three high-tech stealth frigates constitute a task force to be centred on the much-awaited aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya*.<sup>75</sup> The *Gorshkov* aircraft carrier deal also included the lease/purchase of two advanced Russian Akula Class Type 971 nuclear-powered submarines and four Tu-22M strategic bomber/maritime strike aircraft. 2004 also saw BrahMos cruise missiles and Prithvi-III medium range sea to land missiles successfully tested. The 290-kilometer range supersonic BraMos cruise missile will form the basis of the Indian Navy's surface strike capability.

The navy's surface strike capability has been duly augmented with long distance replenishment and amphibious operations capabilities. The 2004 induction of a 24000 ton replenishment tanker, *INS Aditya*, has considerably enhanced the Indian navy's ability to operate for long periods at sea. A critical development has been the 2007 acquisition of the 16,900 ton Landing Platform Dock (LPD), *INS Jalashva*, from the United States (US). In a first ever purchase of a high technology naval vessel from the US, *INS Jalashva* has addressed the Navy's lack of heavy sea-lift and mass-landing capability.

In a giant stride towards developing indigenous technological capabilities, in 2012 India launched its first ever indigenously built nuclear submarine – *INS Arihant*. The nuclear reactor was successfully activated in August 2013, thus making it ready for rigorous sea trials.<sup>76</sup> Experts are of the opinion that *INS Arihant* is the first ballistic missile submarine to have been built outside of the five recognised nuclear powers.<sup>77</sup> Once operational, assumingly

<sup>72</sup> Kailash Kohli, "Naval Gazing into the Future," *The Indian Express*, December 13, 2003.

<sup>73</sup> News Report "India launches first indigenous aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant*," *Times of India*, August 12, 2013, Available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/India-launches-first-indigenous-aircraft-carrier-INS-Vikrant/articleshow/21774409.cms>

<sup>74</sup> Rahul Bedi, "Indian Navy Strives for Regional Dominance," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, December 21, 2005.

<sup>75</sup> David Scott, 'India's Grand Strategy for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13/2 (2006), 97–129, pp. 112.

<sup>76</sup> Jyoti Malhotra, *INS Arihant: "The story of India's incredible hard work"*, Rediff.com News Available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/column-ns-vikrant-the-story-of-indias-incredible-hard-work/20130812.htm>

<sup>77</sup> The global media noted and hailed the giant stride in India's indigenous technological capabilities when India activated the nuclear reactor of its indigenously built nuclear submarine – *INS Arihant*. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-23648310> Also see <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/world/216656/indian-built-nuclear-submarine-activated>

in next two years, the nuclear submarine will complete India's long awaited third dimension of the nuclear triad – the capacity to launch nuclear weapons from land, sea and air. This is bound to influence the strategic calculations of many players in the region, including Pakistan and China.

The developments in the naval operational capabilities have been equally complemented with augmentation of naval infrastructure to support those operational capabilities. In 2005, a new operational naval command, *INS Kadamba*, the 'Southern Command,' was set up in Karwar, over 300 miles south of Mumbai.<sup>78</sup> This is not only destined to be the Indian navy's first ever exclusive naval port, but will also enhance its ability to project power in the Southern Indian Ocean.<sup>79</sup> Built under Phase I of the multi-billion dollar Project Seabird, it is set to be the largest naval base in the region.<sup>80</sup> Further, in 2009, the Indian Prime Minister inaugurated one of the Asia's largest naval academies - *INS Zamorin*. Another significant development was the decision to establish a Far Eastern Naval Command, FENC, off Port Blair on the Andaman Islands. This development considerably advanced the Indian navy's ability to interact with the South East and East Asian region.<sup>81</sup>

Such a robust naval modernization program is no mean achievement for a state whose political elite has long been criticized for their sea blindness. The satisfaction expressed by the then Chief of Naval staff (2012), Admiral Nirmal Verma, about the absence of any 'sea blindness' among the Indian government is unprecedented, given the fact that naval leaders all over the world rarely express their satisfaction with the maritime consciousness of their respective political elites.<sup>82</sup> Admiral Naval Verma asserted:

“A generation ago, the Chief of our Navy would have had to contend with the challenges posed by a national psyche of 'sea blindness'. Today we are in gratitude of the efforts of our veteran community that we suffer no such impediment. The Government of India is completely seized of the imperative to have a credible maritime force that is commensurate to the requirements of our national interests”.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A. Wolfe, Y. Bendersky, and F. Bordonaro, "India's Project Seabird and the Indian Ocean's Balance of Power," PINR, 20 July 2005. Cited in David Scott, 'India's Grand Strategy for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13/2 (2006), 97–129, pp. 112.

<sup>79</sup> Ramachandran, "Indian Navy on the Crest of a Wave," *Asia Times*, 18 June 2005.

<sup>80</sup> R. Vasan, "Strategic Significance of the Naval Base INS Kadamba," SAAG Paper, 1404, 4 June 2005, <http://saag.org/%5Cpapers15%5Cpaper1404.html>

<sup>81</sup> Ramtanu Maitra, "India Bid to Rule the Waves," *Asia Times*, October 19, 2005, Available at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/GJ19Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GJ19Df03.html) Also see V Jayanth, "Far eastern naval command on the anvil," *The Hindu*, December 26, 2000, Available at <http://hindu.com/2000/12/26/stories/0226000e.htm>

<sup>82</sup> Naval Leaders all over the world have a tendency to complain about the alleged sea blindness of their political elites. See Jasper Gerard, "Ministers accused of 'sea blindness' by Britain's most senior Royal Navy figure", *The Telegraph*, June 12, 2009, Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/5517833/Ministers-accused-of-sea-blindness-by-Britains-most-senior-Royal-Navy-figure.html>

<sup>83</sup> Admiral Nirmal Kumar Verma, , Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee & Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy, *Metamorphosis of Matters Maritime: An Indian Perspective*, IISS Arundel House, London

There is an unmistakable proclivity towards naval power. It seems that a new maritime consciousness has emerged in place of the previous decade's sea blindness among the Indian strategy makers.

### 3.2 The Navy's Doctrinal Development

The post Cold War period also witnessed another development within the Indian Navy – a tendency to articulate and document its doctrines and military strategy. Though less significant for the study of international relations, and more importantly for security studies, this signifies an enhanced enthusiasm within the Indian polity for its naval power. India's other two military services, the army and air force, also have designed and released such documents for public consumption, but the navy can easily be considered a trend setter in this regard. In less than two decades after the end of the Cold War, the Indian navy had articulated and released four major doctrinal documents and strategy papers - a radical departure from the past. The most significant among them was the *Indian Maritime Doctrine* 2004, which was followed by a strategy document, "*Freedom to use the seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy*" in May 2007.

In a civilian democracy, military services are always pressed with the need to convince their political elites about the strategic significance of their service in national defence. More so in India's case, where the military has been systematically marginalised from the decision-making process in matters of national security,<sup>84</sup> the need to relay their significance to the political elite is further emphasized. The navy's urgency can be easily construed as its drive to awaken India's sluggish maritime consciousness.<sup>85</sup>

Though aspirational in its content and logic, and despite being released by an individual service headquarters, there are two important implications worth noting about these

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Monday 25 June, 2012. Available at <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/events/archive/2012-4a49/june-7879/metamorphosis-of-matters-maritime-an-indian-perspective-e8cf>

<sup>84</sup> There is a wide consensus that, in India, the military has been marginalised from the government. Immediately after independence the service headquarters was downgraded to become 'attached offices', organizationally external to the Ministry Of Defence (MOD) and therefore removed from major decision-making in government. See Kotera M. Bhimaya, 'Civil-Military Relations: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan' (Diss., Rand Graduate School, 1997), retrievable at [www.rand.org/pubs/authors/b/bhimaya\\_kotera.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/authors/b/bhimaya_kotera.html). Also see Colin Geraghty, "India in the Indian Ocean Region: Re-calibrating U.S. Expectations", American Security Project. Available at <http://americansecurityproject.org/featured-items/2012/india-in-the-indian-ocean-region-re-calibrating-u-s-expectations/> Also See Iskander Rehman, "India's Aspirational Naval Doctrine,"

<sup>85</sup> External observers have analysed the navy's urgency in releasing of two, only marginally different, versions of the same doctrine in an interval of five years between 2004 and 2009, interspersed with the release of a Maritime Military Strategy in 2007, as a drive to awaken India's sluggish maritime consciousness. See Iskander Rehman, "India's Aspirational Naval Doctrine" in Harsh Pant, ed. *The Rise of the Indian Navy : Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012, Also available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/10/15/india-s-aspirational-naval-doctrine/e177>

documents. First, they have been well received by the Indian media, strategic community, and external observers, thus suggesting, and contributing in part towards, the enhanced enthusiasm for naval power in New Delhi. These documents have been exceedingly quoted by the Indian strategic community and external observers alike, to understand the intent of the Indian state. Second, unlike the military doctrines of the other two services of India, the naval doctrine skims over its traditional war fighting role, and rather focuses on the military-strategic role (read foreign policy and geo-politics). It implicitly suggests that the navy has carved out a 'new role' for itself within the national security system to enhance its strategic significance. The role is one of being the Indian state's effective foreign policy instrument. Interestingly, the following assessment of India's naval diplomacy suggests that the navy has been successful in institutionalising some of its foreign policy functions.

### 3.3. Naval Diplomacy

India's earliest maritime revival can be traced in its naval diplomacy much before its expansive naval modernization program began to attract international attention. In a radical departure from the past India held a modest joint exercise<sup>86</sup> with the US navy in May 1992. "This was a 'critical development', as it was the first time that an exercise of this nature had been carried out with a member of a major military alliance (either Western or Eastern) for some thirty-odd years."<sup>87</sup> The joint naval exercise was a culmination of a few mutual visits by military commanders between the US and India. The timing of this joint naval exercise was crucial as in 1991-1992 the world, including India, was still grappling with the effect of the end of the Cold War. It may be naive to read too much into the significance of this joint naval exercise, yet it demonstrates that a change in the Indian political elite's perception towards the naval power was in the offing.

Subsequently India's naval diplomacy grew in scope and reach. A trend in India's naval diplomacy is easily discernible. In the 1990s, which can easily be considered as a formative phase of India's naval diplomacy, the focus was on joint exercise with the US (the only global superpower) and the South East Asian states. During this phase India institutionalised the annual MALABAR exercises (1992) with the US on its western coast, and the MILAN exercises (1995) with the South East Asian states towards its eastern coast. Another fact worth noting is that India's earliest maritime consciousness was visible in its vigorous naval diplomacy in the period from 1992 to 1995 – a period which was still marked by relative

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<sup>86</sup> The first ever Indo-US joint naval exercise was limited both in scope and content, involving only four principal surface combatants for two days in the Arabian Sea.

<sup>87</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "The role of the navy in Indian security policy," *Contemporary South Asia*, (1993) 2:2, 151-164

neglect towards capability accretion.<sup>88</sup> It is a clear case where maritime consciousness precedes the accrual of material capabilities by the Indian state.

By the turn of the twenty first century the extent and geographical reach of Indian naval diplomacy was expanded to a new level. On the one hand, exercises with other Great Powers such as France (VARUNA exercises since 2001), Japan (since 2001), Russia (INDRA exercises since 2003) and the UK (KONKAN exercises since 2004) were initiated and institutionalised. Simultaneously, on the other hand, India's gaze shifted towards the Pacific Ocean, especially the South China Sea (SCS).

Since 2000, there has been an unmistakable Indian propensity to conduct military exercises in the SCS, with exercises ranging from bilateral (South Korea 2000, Vietnam November 2000), to unilateral (2000), to long term unilateral naval deployment (November 2004) in the SCS. It is important to note that the SCS is a centre of major maritime dispute in the Asia-Pacific region involving China and five littoral states of South East Asia and is a source of Great Power interest in the region. It is equally important to note that officially the Indian political elite regards the SCS as a region external to India's 'core' strategic interest.<sup>89</sup> Still, the Indian navy's decade long forays in the SCS contradict the Indian state's official statement about their new found interest in SCS.

The preceding section raises the obvious question: What explains India's new emerging maritime consciousness despite its previous reticence (1947-1991) towards developing naval power? The following section surveys the literature to explore the state of the art on the issue.

### 3.4 Causes of the Rise of the Indian Naval Power

The dominant narrative of Indian maritime literature is that there is a strategic rationale behind India's emerging maritime consciousness, plus its rising material capabilities is giving the wherewithal to the Indian state to drive this maritime consciousness. This narrative is informed by various variants of realism. The logic of a strategic rationale is informed by defensive realism which posits that in an anarchic system, the state's primary goal is security.<sup>90</sup> The factor of rising material capabilities is informed by another variant of realism, neo-classical realism, which posits that states with rising wealth and material capabilities

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<sup>88</sup> As recently as 1996, Kailash Kohli, then Commander of the Western Fleet, was warning "history has taught India two bitter lessons: firstly, that neglect of maritime power can culminate in a cession of sovereignty, and secondly, that it takes decades to revert to being a considerable maritime power after a period of neglect and decline." See K. Kohli, "Maritime Power in Peace and War—an Indian View," *African Security Review*, 5.2, 1996

<sup>89</sup> Since the beginning of the twenty first century the Indian state has publicly articulated the region from the Persian Gulf in the western Indian Ocean to the Malacca Straits in the eastern Indian Ocean as an "arc of its primary strategic interest". For a discourse on India's articulation of its strategic core interest in this region see Walter C. Ladwig, 'Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific', *Asian Security*, (2009), 5: 2, 87 — 113, pp 90.

<sup>90</sup> For a theoretical exposition of defensive realism see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 128–161.

choose more wealthy security options.<sup>91</sup> It is assumed that the maritime consciousness of a state is a function of the mere presence (or absence) of material capabilities.

There are several 'interests' identified in the literature that are believed to be driving India's new found maritime consciousness. Each conceptual theme claiming to explain the Indian maritime consciousness will be discussed in the following section to understand the strategic rationale behind India's rising naval power. According to the realist argument, interests are given, and states are driven by their interests in the international system. The causal power of ideas in 'determining' those interests has been under-examined in the literature on Indian maritime power.

### 3.5 Peninsular Geography and the Indian Ocean

The literature on Indian maritime power is inextricably linked to India's peninsular geography and the Indian Ocean. India geographically projects into the Indian Ocean a long, triangular, wedge-shaped landmass extending some fifteen hundred miles into the Indian Ocean. Interestingly, the Indian Ocean is depicted as both the cause of India's emerging maritime consciousness,<sup>92</sup> and the goal of its maritime ambitions. On the one hand analysts note how the Indian Ocean has significantly contributed to the Indian strategic community's aspirations for naval power. Simultaneously, on the other hand, they note the need felt by the Indian strategic community to play a greater role in underwriting its security and stability.

Either way, peninsular geography alone cannot be attributed as the cause of India's emerging maritime consciousness. In fact, according to the proponents of sea power, "maritime geography is *not* an independent variable in the sea power equation".<sup>93</sup> Moreover, India's peninsular geography has failed to stimulate its political elite from developing naval power in previous decades (1947-1991).

### 3.6 Globalization, Maritime Trade and Resource Scarcity

Many scholars argue that India's increasing maritime trade<sup>94</sup> and impending resource-scarcity,<sup>95</sup> both facilitated by the wider phenomenon of globalization,<sup>96</sup> are the primary

<sup>91</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>92</sup> There is a tendency among Indian analysts to seek strategic inspiration from India's peninsular geography and the Indian Ocean. Interestingly it is assumed that India cannot afford to remain sea blind owing to its maritime geography, which was exactly the case in reality. See K.R. Singh "The Changing Paradigm of India's Maritime Security", *International Studies*, August 2003 40: 229-245, Available at <http://isq.sagepub.com/content/40/3/229.citation>

<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey Till, "The constituents of sea power" in *Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp 84.

<sup>94</sup> Since 1991, India has moved gradually away from a strategy of industrialization through import substitution and public sector production to a more open, market-oriented trade and investment regime. India's

causes of India's maritime consciousness. These views on maritime consciousness can be traced from Barry Buzan's (1978) work *A Sea of Troubles? Sources of Dispute in the New Ocean Regime*, which manifests that the ocean has become a source of instability in the international system.<sup>97</sup> Buzan cites "the dramatic rise in the realisable economic value of oceans and the rapid spread of sovereign states to cover virtually all land areas as reasons to explain why oceans have become areas of intense competition for scarce goods."<sup>98</sup> These factors have raised the awareness about the security of Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) in an unprecedented manner.

An Indian analyst K. R. Singh<sup>99</sup> raises a few curious questions: why is there sudden awareness about the security of (SLOCs)? Were the sea lanes not threatened earlier, for example, during the Cold War era? Who threatens them now? What type of threat is posed and how can it be met? K. R. Singh refrains from offering any convincing answers to these questions about the sudden increased awareness about the aspects of maritime security. But they point towards a general assumption that increasing maritime trade necessarily drives a state towards a maritime security outlook. It is assumed that India's maritime consciousness is an outcome of India's increasing maritime trade and globalization.

This argument has some shortcomings. First, it will be argued here that the Indian state's propensity towards naval power during the period under review, contrary to the general assumption in the literature, precedes the growth in India's maritime trade (and material capabilities). It would be prudent to analyse the relative growth in India's maritime trade during this period (1992-1995) to validate the claim of many analysts who argue for a cause and effect relationship between India's maritime trade and emerging maritime consciousness.

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merchandise trade as a percentage of GDP continued to increase to forty per cent of GDP in 2009-2010. For India's economic reforms and subsequent growth see Jagdish Bhagwati, "What Went Wrong?" in Rahul Mukherji, ed., *India's Economic Transition: The Politics of Reforms*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 27-51. Also see Montek S. Ahluwalia, "Economic reforms in India since 1991: Has gradualism worked?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(3), (2002), 67-88. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/212076231?accountid=14700>

<sup>95</sup> According to this view India's dependency on overseas energy assets to sustain its domestic economic growth is the primary cause of India's emerging naval power. See Niclas D. Weimar (2013): "Sino-Indian power preponderance in maritime Asia: a (re-)source of conflict in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea," *Global Change, Peace & Security: formerly Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change*, 25:1, 5-26

<sup>96</sup> Donald L. Berlin, "India in the Indian Ocean", *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2006, Vol. 59, No. 2. Also see Geoffrey Till, "Sea Power in a globalized world: Two tendencies", in *Sea Power: A Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Taylor and Francis, 2nd edition, 2011. Also see, Harsh Pant, "India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities"

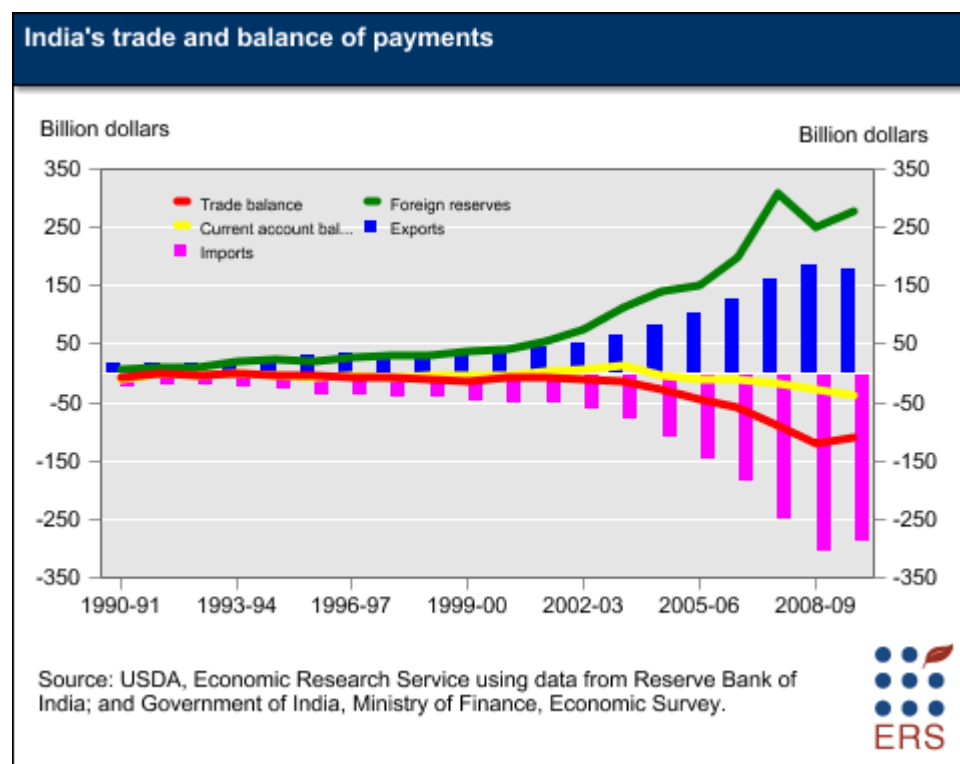
<sup>97</sup> Barry Buzan, *A Sea of Troubles? Sources of Dispute in the New Ocean Regime*, Adelphi Paper 143, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1978,

<sup>98</sup> Barry Buzan, *A Sea of Troubles? Sources of Dispute in the New Ocean Regime*, Cited by Andy Yee, Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: A Comparative Analysis of the South China Sea and the East China Sea, in: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, (2011), 40, 2, 165-193.

<sup>99</sup> K.R. Singh, "The Changing Paradigm of India's Maritime Security" *International Studies* August 2003 40: 229-245, Available at <http://isq.sagepub.com/content/40/3/229.citation>

India's foreign trade has expanded rapidly following sweeping trade policy and exchange rate reforms during 1991-93.<sup>100</sup> India's total trade has expanded more than eleven-fold from \$46 billion in 1990-91 to about \$465 billion in 2009-10 (See Fig. 2). Given the Indian state's gradualism<sup>101</sup> in its economic reforms during the 1990s the growth in external trade was not sweeping. It is evident from figure 1.1 that India's total trade value, starting from a base figure of \$46 billion in 1990-1991, hovered around less than \$50 billion value till 2000-01.

**Figure 2: India's trade and balance of payments**



Source: United States Department of Agriculture<sup>102</sup>

Given the fact that ninety percent<sup>103</sup> of India's total trade is carried across the sea, the total volume increase in India's maritime trade in the period 1992-1995 would be even less. During this period, although India's maritime trade grew, yet the growth was not significant enough to justify a radical shift in Indian maritime consciousness. Therefore it would not be an exaggeration to submit that India's emerging maritime consciousness during the period 1992-1995 is not necessarily driven by any increase in its maritime trade.

<sup>100</sup> For India's economic reforms in early 1990s see Jagdish Bhagwati, "What Went Wrong?" in Rahul Mukherji, ed., *India's Economic Transition: The Politics of Reforms*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 27-51,

<sup>101</sup> Montek S. Ahluwalia, "Economic reforms in India since 1991: Has gradualism worked?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16(3), (2002), 67-88. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/212076231?accountid=14700>

<sup>102</sup> Data retrieved from United States Department of Agriculture. Available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-trade/countries-regions/india/trade.aspx#.Ugnnh5JHIYI>

<sup>103</sup> K.R. Singh, "The Changing Paradigm of India's Maritime Security"

Contrary to this suggestion, India's earliest signs of maritime revival were evident in the period from 1992 to 1995 through its vigorous naval diplomacy. It was a period when, despite relative neglect of its naval capabilities, the Indian state demonstrated a proclivity towards an effective application of naval diplomacy in the service of its foreign policy goals. Since 1991 India has periodically held joint naval exercises with Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia in the Indian Ocean. In subsequent years, it has undertaken bilateral exercises with Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines. This vigorous naval diplomacy towards South East Asia in the early 1990s was, in part, driven by the objective of allaying the genuine security concerns of many states.<sup>104</sup> During this period India launched its "Look East Policy" (LEP) with the primary objective of gaining access to various multilateral forums of the South East Asian region. Towards this goal the Indian state had to orchestrate a radical shift in its image in the region and construe a non-threatening image so as to assist its smooth entry into the region's multilateral forums. Favourable maritime diplomacy during this period had the desired effect and by the mid-1990s India was given access to the region's primary security forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

Also, notwithstanding the above analysis, the argument that increasing maritime trade is responsible for the Indian state's emerging maritime consciousness is a lazy assumption. It seems that such assumption emanates from the 'traditional view of sea-power'<sup>105</sup>, which posits that merchant shipping is both a source of maritime power and something that navies naturally need to defend.<sup>106</sup> The maritime economy is very important for the development of sea power in general and naval power in particular. This view of sea power also presumes a strong representation and influence of the trading and seafaring merchant community on the state's strategic decision making to build strong navies to protect their sea based mercantile interests.<sup>107</sup>

However, India's emerging maritime consciousness is not convincingly explained by the traditional view of sea power. First, it is important to note that emerging maritime consciousness in India is towards the naval power and not the mercantile aspect of sea power. Rahul Roy Chaudhury manifests his concern about the importance of a viable national

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<sup>104</sup> It is important to note that India's previous naval expansion in the late 1980s and strategically assertive behaviour in South Asia has generated security concerns among the littoral states of the North East Indian Ocean.

<sup>105</sup> Sea power can best be represented as a tight and inseparable system in which naval power protects the maritime assets that are the ultimate source of its effectiveness. See Geoffrey Till, "The Sea and Sea Power" in *Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty first Century*, Franc Cass Publishers, London, 2004, pp 18

<sup>106</sup> According to this traditional view of sea power, several European states in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had discovered the huge advantage to be derived from the close association between the naval and mercantile aspects of the sea power. See Geoffrey Till, "The Sea and Sea Power" in *Sea Power: A Guide for the Twenty first Century*, Franc Cass Publishers, London, 2004,

<sup>107</sup> Geoffrey Till summarises the central argument of the traditional view of sea power. Lately this argument has been developed further to explain the virtuous maritime circle between maritime trade, mercantile finance, government and navies. See Peter Padfield, *Maritime Supremacy and the Opening of the Western Mind* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook Press), 1999, Richard Harding, *Sea Power and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830* (London: University College Press), 1999

merchant fleet in addition to a navy for a country's security, noting that India's rapidly growing trade is not being met by a similar growth in either India's merchant fleet or port handling capacity.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, even against the wishful thinking of many in the Indian strategic community, the navy and the marine economy (maritime trade & merchant shipping) of India are not integrated with each other. "The navy functions within the Ministry of Defence, where military officials are further given only a narrow perimeter to develop a mechanism of cooperation, with little latitude to go beyond the scope allotted by civilian officials,"<sup>109</sup> while the maritime economy is essentially a prerogative of the Ministry of Commerce, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Shipping. Naval power and maritime trade are two different compartments, like many other compartments, of India's national security. Indian strategic thinking has, at best, been less successful in integrating the different compartments of national security into holistic security goals.<sup>110</sup>

India is a new aspirant to the elite club of blue-water navies and its aspirations to become a blue-water navy is not a manifestation of the aspirations of its mercantile and trading community. Rather it is a manifestation of the aspirations of India's strategic community. This important fact has two implications. First, it is safe to conclude that globalization, though an all-pervasive phenomenon in international relations, is not the only cause of India's maritime ambitions. Second, it leads to the important question: what does the Indian state (strategic community) aspire to – security or power?

A survey of the literature reveals that realists concur that Indian naval growth is a 'security maximization' behavior where the Indian state is pursuing the modest goal of security in an anarchic world. It is argued that China is the primary security challenge for the Indian state, and India's emerging maritime consciousness is driven by its desire to balance against China. The following section will analyze the China factor in India's emerging maritime consciousness. It will be argued that the China factor has been exaggerated in explaining India's newly emerging maritime consciousness.

### 3.7 Balancing against China

According to the majority view, Sino-Indian strategic competition in the maritime space of the Indian Ocean is the key determinant of India's increasing shift towards a maritime

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<sup>108</sup> Roy-Chaudhury is an eminent expert on India's maritime security. He was a member of India's influential National Security Council Secretariat which provides secretarial support to National Security Council (NSC) – apex agency looking into the country's political, economic, energy and strategic security concerns. See Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, *India's Maritime Security*, New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2000. 208pp.

<sup>109</sup> Colin Geraghty, "India in the Indian Ocean Region: Re-calibrating U.S. Expectations", American Security Project. Available at <http://americansecurityproject.org/featured-items/2012/india-in-the-indian-ocean-region-re-calibrating-u-s-expectations/>

<sup>110</sup> P. Chidambaram, Union Minister of Finance (2013) submits that "until recently, we have taken a very compartmentalized view of national security. Each threat to national security was neatly fitted into one compartment." See P Chidambaram, speech on K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Lecture on "National Security – Challenges and Priorities" February 6, 2013, Available at <http://www.idsa.in/keyspeeches/IndiasNationalSecurityChallengesandPriorities>

security outlook.<sup>111</sup> Indian observers frequently suggest that the Chinese threat is best articulated in the form of its “string of pearls”<sup>112</sup> strategy. The goal of this “string of pearls” strategy is to secure access to locations that could be used to project Chinese power into the Indian Ocean. It is argued that, as a part of this strategy, China has helped establish a network of ports and infrastructure with several littoral states around India – including several nations that have traditionally been hostile to India. There are reports of Chinese ‘help’ in developing ports such as at Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, several naval bases in Myanmar and lately offered its assistance in the development of naval infrastructure to the Maldives. “India has long regarded the Maldives as falling within its South Asian sphere of influence.”<sup>113</sup> There are reports that the operation of the Gwadar port in Pakistan had already been handed over to a Chinese firm in 2012.<sup>114</sup> Therefore it is argued that there are reasons for the Indian security establishment to believe that China’s encroachment into the Indian Ocean is part of a coherent strategy to encircle India and confine its influence to South Asia.<sup>115</sup> These concerns are accompanied by apprehension over on-going Chinese naval modernization, which is viewed as a possible threat to India’s strategic interests in the region.<sup>116</sup>

The above argument is correct in depicting China as the primary factor that animates current Indian strategic thinking. C. Raja Mohan asserts that balancing China is in ‘the very DNA of

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<sup>111</sup> See Harsh Pant, “India in the Indian Ocean: Growing Mismatch Between Ambitions and Capabilities”, David Brewster, *An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?*, Donald L. Berlin, “India in the Indian Ocean”, Walter C. Ladwig, “Delhi’s Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, “Look East,” and India’s Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific”, Niclas D Weimar, *Sino-Indian power preponderance in maritime Asia: a (re-)source of conflict in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea*,

<sup>112</sup> The term was first used in a 2005 report titled ‘Energy Futures in Asia’ prepared for the US Secretary of Defence by the private consultants, Booz-Allen-Hamilton. Ever since then this term has gained wide currency among the Indian strategic community to define China’s strategy of acquiring forward bases and ports around India’s immediate neighbourhood in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>113</sup> David Brewster, “An Indian Sphere of Influence?” *Security Challenges*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 2010), pp. 1-20.

<sup>114</sup> Syed F. Haider, “A great game begins as China takes control of Gwadar port,” *The National*, October 7, 2012, Available at <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/a-great-game-begins-as-china-takes-control-of-gwadar-port#ixzz2btinwrGJ> Also See New Report, “China takes over operational control of Pakistan’s Gwadar Port,” Zee News India, Available at [http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/china-takes-over-operational-control-of-pakistan-s-gwadar-port\\_850558.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/china-takes-over-operational-control-of-pakistan-s-gwadar-port_850558.html)

<sup>115</sup> Brahma Chellaney, “Forestalling Strategic Conflict in Asia,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* Vol. 169, No. 9 (November 2006), pp. 29–33; and John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 5. The Indian Navy’s maritime doctrine explicitly discusses “attempts by China to strategically encircle India” and warns of Chinese encroachment into “our maritime zone.” Cited in “India’s Naval Posture: Looking East,” *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (August 2005), p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, “Indian Navy: Keeping Pace with Emerging Challenges,” in Lawrence W. Prabhakar et al., eds., *The Evolving Maritime Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2006), p. 191 Cited by Walter C. Ladwig, ‘Delhi’s Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, “Look East,” and India’s Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific’

India's geopolitics' and has been since the early 1950s.<sup>117</sup> The question arises: balancing where – land or sea? Realists themselves differ on a state's ability or willingness to balance at land and/or sea. Jack Levy and William Thompson, in their work, *Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?*, argue that the great powers or lesser powers have least incentive in balancing against the leading sea power of the system.<sup>118</sup> Though the argument is about the counter-hegemony balancing, it emphasizes that balancing is a strategic choice, and states have differing incentives to balance at land or/and sea. The take away of this realist debate on balancing at sea or land, is that continental threat is more menacing than sea-borne threat that has limited capability in disrupting the domestic political system.<sup>119</sup> That is to say, states, according to the realist argument, have more incentive to balance against the continental threat than the maritime threat. Notwithstanding the theoretical argument, I will still examine the causative effect of the Chinese maritime threat to seek an explanation for India's growing naval power.

If the intention in the previous narrative on Chinese growing naval power in the Indian Ocean is to suggest that the Chinese threat from the sea has been paramount in raising Indian political elite's maritime consciousness, then first I will argue against this claim, and then subsequently will emphasize the need to understand the impending change by the causal power of ideas and identity on the Indian state's changing motives.

Despite the growing 'China wariness' in the Indian strategic community, there is an emerging view that the previously stated Chinese 'string of pearls' strategy in the Indian Ocean is the result of slightly over-stretched imagination. G. S. Khurana (2008) acknowledges that regardless of Chinese intent, if any, the Chinese power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean is at least a few decades away.<sup>120</sup> Raja Mohan also acknowledges, "In the past there was much speculation about Chinese presence in Myanmar's Cocos Islands in the Andaman Sea. That speculation turned out to be false."<sup>121</sup> External observers have pointed out that the

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<sup>117</sup> C. Raja Mohan, 'The Evolution of Sino-Indian Relations: Implications for the United States', in Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan, *Power Realignment in Asia: China, India and the United States* (New Delhi: Sage Publications 2009), 270–90, at 288

<sup>118</sup> Jack Levy and William Thompson argue that leading sea powers have neither the capability nor the incentive to threaten the domestic political order of other major powers, and are thus more likely to be bandwagoned with as a supplier of global public goods and a potential ally against continental threats than balanced against. See Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 7–43.

<sup>119</sup> David W. Blagden in his critique of Jack Levy and William Thompson's work says that "the argument that navies are of much lower utility than armies for menacing domestic political order, all else held equal, is hard to refute." See "Sea Powers, Continental Powers, and Balancing Theory" *International Security* Volume 36, Number 2, Fall 2011

<sup>120</sup> Gurpreet S. Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis* Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 1–39.

<sup>121</sup> C Raja Mohan, "India-Myanmar Naval Diplomacy," *The Indian Express*, March 11, 2013, Available at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/indiamyanmar-naval-diplomacy/1086362/0>

Chinese navy has no historical traditions of projecting power beyond its coastal waters, and has only a relatively small number of blue water naval combatant vessels.<sup>122</sup>

Another way of examining the effect of the perceived “Chinese threat” behind India’s emerging maritime consciousness is to examine the “type of naval strategy” being pursued by the Indian Navy. This evaluation will be helpful in comparing the Indian Navy’s *threat perception* and its response to the perceived *threat*. Naval theorists concur that different threats demand different responses and broadly conceive two types of naval tactics – sea-control strategy and sea-denial strategy.<sup>123</sup>

While sea-control is considered an ambitious strategy as it aims to use the sea when and where one wishes, whether to trade or to project military force, it is achieved by limiting an adversary's ability to attack one's own ships, and aircraft carriers are central premise of this sea-control strategy. Sea-denial strategy on the other hand is considered modest and has the limited aim of denying the adversary use of the sea. It is the ability to attack an adversary's ships while not being able to stop them attacking yours. These days, sea-denial can be achieved without putting ships to sea, because land-based aircraft, long-range missiles and submarines can sink ships much more cost-effectively than other ships can. Submarines form the basis of a sea-denial strategy.

Naval historians generally concur that if *threat* is the primary cause of a naval build-up against a dominant sea power then states have shown propensity to pursue submarine based sea-denial strategy.<sup>124</sup> Experts are of the opinion that China is pursuing a robust sea-denial strategy,<sup>125</sup> whereas India has a stated ambition of a three aircraft carrier based regional sea-control strategy<sup>126</sup>. The type of naval strategy being pursued by the Indian state may also

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<sup>122</sup> David Shambaugh, ‘The evolving security order in Asia’, in Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan, *Power Realignments in Asia: China, India and the United States* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), p.148. Also see David Brewster, “An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean” *Security Challenges*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 2010), pp. 1-20. Pp 6.

<sup>123</sup> Hugh White, “China shifts Pacific waters with its aircraft carrier trials,” *The Age*, Aug 30, 2011, Available at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/china-shifts-pacific-waters-with-its-aircraft-carrier-trials-20110829-1jib4.html#ixzz2TCaEAgCF>. Hugh White is a professor of strategic studies at ANU. For further discussion on sea control and sea denial strategy see Robert C Rubel, “Talking about Sea Control”, *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2010, Vol. 63, No. 4, Professor Rubel is Dean of Naval Warfare Studies at the Naval War College.

<sup>124</sup> The early twentieth century German navy and the contemporary Chinese navy are prominent examples of this fact. Naval experts opine that Germany should have developed more submarines than aircraft carriers to deter their perceived threat of the British navy. See Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power and the Tirpitz Plan* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 260. Chinese Navy is developing a strong submarine based naval force see Hugh White, “China shifts Pacific waters with its aircraft carrier trials,”

<sup>125</sup> Hugh White, “China shifts Pacific waters with its aircraft carrier trials,” Experts are of the opinion that India’s emphasis is on sea control, where as China has adopted a robust sea-denial strategy in its respective maritime domain.

<sup>126</sup> Arun Prakash, “Future Strategy and Challenges for the Indian Navy,” RUSI Defence Systems, Autumn 2005, 31–33, 31–32.

corroborate with the scholarly opinion that India is a benefactor of a benign maritime environment.<sup>127</sup>

It is apparent from the above analysis that the alleged Chinese maritime threat is not the primary cause of India's emerging maritime consciousness. India turned to the seas in the early 1990s<sup>128</sup> and by then the Chinese maritime threat, even if existent, was still a distant proposition. Neither the Indian navy's strategy nor the pattern of naval acquisitions suggests that Indian naval power is a threat based response.

Yet we may not rush to seek explanation through the causal power of identity in shaping the Indian state's shifting maritime preferences and shall further examine the realist argument in the Indian state's efforts to balance China. I argue that the Indian state's changing preference towards maritime power over the previously favoured continental power is defying the realist logic. To this end I will show two recent cases of Sino-Indian military-strategic standoffs where the Indian state's shift of preference is evident and defies the realist logic of balancing. The cases are of the India-China standoff in the South China Sea (December, 2012) and the alleged Chinese incursion in Ladakh, at India's northern frontier (April, 2013).

### 3.8 Preferential or Differential Balancing of China

According to the theory of balance of power, states respond to balancing when faced with a significant external threat. Balancing is a behaviour through which states maximise their security.<sup>129</sup> States may choose to balance internally or externally. Internal balancing involves internal generation of military power through armament, military build-up and developing aggregate national power, and developing the ability to exercise military power. External balancing involves maximising security through external alliances. The Indian state has traditionally preferred internal balancing over external balancing to preserve its strategic autonomy.<sup>130</sup>

In December 2012, India forcefully asserted itself in the SCS dispute when its Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral D. K. Joshi publically stated that New Delhi was ready to intervene in disputes in the SCS if Indian economic interests came under threat. Admiral Joshi asserted "we (the Indian navy) will be required to go there and we are prepared for

<sup>127</sup> James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty First Century*, London, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>128</sup> C Raja Mohan, "India-Myanmar Naval Diplomacy," *The Indian Express*, March 11, 2013, Available at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/indiamyanmar-naval-diplomacy/1086362/0>

<sup>129</sup> For a theoretical exposition of Balance of power behaviour in international politics see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (New York: Addison Wesley), 1979

<sup>130</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, DC: Brookings Press, 2001),

that.”<sup>131</sup> The admiral went on to say that the Indian Navy has been holding exercises to prepare for such contingencies. The government in New Delhi, if not a party to this statement, chose to remain silent and did not offer any explanations. Moreover there was no intense diplomatic or political activity noted in New Delhi to suggest any damage control exercise.

It is important to note that the South China Sea is considered external to India’s ‘core’ strategic interests, extending from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca straits. *Indian Maritime Doctrine* 2009 also describes the South China Sea as external to India’s ‘core’ strategic interest. India’s interest in the South China Sea can be traced back to October 2011 when India signed an agreement with Vietnam to expand and promote oil exploration in the South China Sea.<sup>132</sup> India accepted Vietnam’s invitation to explore oil in the contested waters of the South China Sea and chose to ignore a Chinese official demarche issued to India in November 2011.<sup>133</sup> Irrespective of the future trajectory of such skirmishes, India’s assertiveness against China in the distant South China Sea manifests the Indian state’s growing confidence in its naval power and willingness to confront China at sea.

In complete contrast, the Indian state demonstrated acute unwillingness to assert itself in another face-off with China towards its northern continental borders. In April 2013 the Chinese military allegedly intruded nineteen kilometres inside what Indians consider their territory in the Deepsang Valley in northern India.<sup>134</sup> Though considered as one among many frequent border incursions along the much disputed four thousand kilometre long Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, this incident signifies the change in the Indian political elite’s perception towards continental security. There was intense political activity in New Delhi with efforts to ‘localize’ the issue.<sup>135</sup> There were media reports in New Delhi that the Indian civilian leadership had a ‘pessimistic view’ of Indian military

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<sup>131</sup> See News Report “Indian navy prepared to deploy to South China Sea” *Reuters*, December 3, 2012, Available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/12/03/south-china-sea-india-navy-oil-ongc-idINDEE8B209U20121203>

<sup>132</sup> For the complete story about India’s interest in the South China Sea see Harsh V. Pant, “Understanding India’s Interest in the South China Sea: Getting into the Seaweeds” Strategic insight and bipartisan policy solutions, CSIS (Centre for Strategic and International Studies) December 18, 2012, Available at <http://csis.org/publication/understanding-indias-interest-south-china-sea-getting-seaweeds>

<sup>133</sup> Vietnam has officially appreciated India’s “constructive” role in stabilizing the situation in the SCS. Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, commented that “We highly appreciate India’s constructive position on this issue.” See “Vietnam appreciates India’s role in South China Sea,” *Times of India*, Nov. 18, 2013, Available online at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-11-18/india/44201454\\_1\\_south-china-sea-oil-exploration-asean-and-china](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-11-18/india/44201454_1_south-china-sea-oil-exploration-asean-and-china)

<sup>134</sup> For a complete story of the India-China military standoff in Ladakh in April 2013 see media reports Rajat Pandit, “India-China troop face-offs continue after Ladakh military stand-off” *The Times of India*, May 26, 2013, Available at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-26/india/39537838\\_1\\_pla-troops-daulat-beg-oldi-dbo](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-26/india/39537838_1_pla-troops-daulat-beg-oldi-dbo)

<sup>135</sup> Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khursheed dismissed the incident, variously calling it “localized” and even described it as “acne”. See Indrani Bagchi, “India misreads Chinese incursion, ties itself in knots”

capabilities as against China's military capabilities.<sup>136</sup> Also, it is important to note that Northern Kashmir is of greater geo-strategic significance to the Indian state than the distant South China Sea, and has more 'electoral salience'<sup>137</sup> for competitive Indian domestic politics.

Yet it defies logic why the Indian political elite should have two different responses to the same external adversary. Moreover it defies the strategic rationale of the Indian state in overlooking the need to develop land-based material capabilities to deter a more realistic military threat from China in favour of naval build-up. The above two case studies are clear instances of the Indian political elite's changing preference from continental power to maritime power. There is evidence that the Indian political elite are becoming more inclined towards India's naval capabilities than land-based military capabilities. This shift in the Indian political elite's perception is not explained by the realist logic of security and balance of power. If security is the primary goal of state behaviour, then it is scarce for the Indian state along its northern frontiers with China, rather than in the high seas of the Asia-Pacific region.

This puzzle about India's changing preference towards maritime power was evident much before the actual rise in the Indian state's material capabilities, and is sustained without a dominant strategic rationale, at times even at the cost of its continental security, and seeks further explanation. The answer to this puzzle can be sought in the causal power of ideas on the decision makers. Ideas, though not unconnected to interests, can take on a life of their own.<sup>138</sup> Ideas can have numerous sources such as norms, strategic-culture, political-culture, identity and the collective aspirations of a society. I seek to offer an explanation to India's new found propensity towards naval power by conceptions of 'identity' (in the next chapter). There are views to suggest that India's emerging maritime ambitions are linked with the Indian political elite's conception of India's identity, or any aspirational identity within the international system.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Indrani Bagchi, "India misreads Chinese incursion, ties itself in knots" *The Times of India* May 1, 2013, Available at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-01/india/38957273\\_1\\_chinese-mea-sumdorong-chu](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-01/india/38957273_1_chinese-mea-sumdorong-chu)

<sup>137</sup> For a limited electoral salience of foreign policy issues in India's competitive domestic politics see Vipin Narand and Paul Staniland, "Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy" *India Review*, Vol. 11, no. 2, 2012, pp 76-94

<sup>138</sup> Jolyon Howorth, "Discourse, ideas, and epistemic communities in European Security and Defence Policy" *West European Politics*. 27.2 (Mar. 2004): p211

<sup>139</sup> Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh (2000) asserts: "India's parameters of security concerns clearly extend beyond confines of the convenient albeit questionable geographical definition of South Asia..." See: Jaswant Singh, June 2000, cited by Amitabh Mattoo, "ASEAN in India's Foreign Policy," F. Grare and Mattoo, eds., *India and ASEAN* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 91-118, 105.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented an overview of rising Indian naval power and has questioned the realist logic of material capabilities and the strategic rationale behind it. The chapter concludes that there is some evidence to suggest that Indian maritime consciousness precedes the rise in material capabilities and defies the strategic rationale of naval build-up. This fact does create necessary intellectual space for making a case for the role of ideological factors in precipitating the emergence of maritime consciousness among the Indian political elite. The chapter makes a case for an analytical framework of identity as a variable in explaining India's maritime ambitions. The next chapter will seek to develop this argument.

## Chapter 4: From a Sub-Continental Power to an Asia-Pacific Player: India's Emerging Identity

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The existing literature on India's foreign policy engagement with the Asia-Pacific region is reflective of the historical dominance of overtly positivist approaches in International Relations (IR) theory. The positivist approaches to the discipline rely excessively on material factor based analyses of international politics and precludes the role of inter-subjective factors in influencing state behaviours. Realists analyze India's emergence as an Asia-Pacific player<sup>140</sup> as a case of sphere of influence<sup>141</sup>.

This article aims to argue against the dominance of a material factor based explanation of India's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region<sup>142</sup> and to offer a constructivist explanation which argues that India's deepening engagement with the region is a reflection of its desire to craft a new external *identity* for itself – the identity of an “Asia-Pacific player.” This new identity is different from its previous identity of a “South Asian power.” Though there are many tangible benefits (material aspects of power) attached to India's engagement with the region, the primary, overarching goal is the status (discursive aspects of power) attached to the identity of being an Asia-Pacific player. The Indian strategic elite perceive to attach, and the international community seems to confer, considerable status on this identity of being an “Asia-Pacific player.”<sup>143</sup> It feeds to the Indian strategic community's long felt desire for status in international politics.

The need for a constructivist reading of India's foreign security behaviour emanates from the fact that there are several emergent trends in India's foreign security behaviour (especially within the geo-strategic context of South Asia and the Asia-Pacific) which are not convincingly explained by existing positivist approaches in the literature. It is assumed in existing literature that India is translating its rising national power to enhance its sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region. This underlying assumption, which is a reflection of the

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<sup>140</sup> Traditionally India has not been understood to be part of the Asia-Pacific region. But increasingly India's role in Asia-Pacific geo-politics is being recognized both by states in the region, and the strategic community. See David Brewster, “Development of Indian Strategic Thinking about the Asia-Pacific”, *India as an Asia-Pacific Power*, Taylor and Francis Publications, 2012

<sup>141</sup> Indian analyst C. Raja Mohan submits that “India wants to ensure for itself a weighty role in the future balance of power arrangements in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific region.” See C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 236

<sup>142</sup> For India's economic, strategic, and political engagement with Asia-Pacific region and its emergence as an Asia-Pacific player see Harsh V. Pant (2007): India in the Asia-Pacific: Rising Ambitions with an Eye on China, *Asia-Pacific Review*, 14:1, 54-71, David Scot, “Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia”, *International Studies*, 2007 44: 123, Walter C. Ladwig, 'Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, “Look East,” and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific', *Asian Security*, (2009), 5: 2, 87 — 113,

<sup>143</sup> For an overview on the role of “status” in India's strategic world views towards the Asia-Pacific region see Bronson Percival, “India as an Asia-Pacific Power,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, April, 2012, Vol.34(1), p.133(3)

dominance of material factor based analysis of international politics, appears to be flawed. According to conventional realist logic the Indian state should first translate its rising national power to enhance its influence at the very core of its desired sphere of influence – the South Asia region – before seeking influence in “extra regional” areas.<sup>144</sup> Traditionally India has claimed for itself a role of regional security manager in South Asia and has demonstrated a proclivity in strategically asserting itself on its neighbors. In contrast to this limited hegemon<sup>145</sup> role in South Asia during the Cold War, India has become less hegemonic in its orientation towards its neighbors in the post Cold War period.<sup>146</sup>

Moreover this is also in contrast to the logic of sphere of influence where a state’s power and influence should be at its peak at the “core” of the sphere of influence. How does the realist logic that the Indian state is seeking a sphere of influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region, have a strategic rationale when the same Indian state is abstaining from exercising its influence in its core region of sphere of influence? Some realists claim to explain this change in India’s strategic behavior in South Asia as a “tactical” move, where the Indian state is consciously being less proactive in its neighborhood and is focusing its primary attention on the global setting.<sup>147</sup> But such an argument is contradictory to the conventional realist assessment about transformation of a regional power into a global power.

Similarly India’s political elite has demonstrated a radical shift in its perception and confidence towards its naval power as opposed to land based military power, in responding to threats to India’s security and national interests. This is relatively a new phenomenon in India’s foreign security behavior. India has traditionally been a continental power where its land based military has enjoyed maximum attention and confidence of its political elite, and the navy has been a junior partner in national security management. But lately (2012-2013), the way the Indian state has responded to some perceived threats from its primary strategic adversary, China, demonstrates the emerging shift in its political elite’s perception towards its maritime power. These alleged threats were located on two different geo-strategic fronts – South Asia (Northern Kashmir) and the Asia-Pacific (South China Sea).<sup>148</sup> What explains these major shifts in Indian strategic behaviour?

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<sup>144</sup> Scholars of international relations argue that historically states aspiring to have great power status seek regional dominance before expanding their influence further. See Warren Cohen, “China’s Rise in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30:4–5 (2007), pp. 683–704.

<sup>145</sup> Rajesh Basrur argues that India was a limited hegemon in the Cold War period. See Rajesh M. Basrur, “Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia,” *International Studies*, 2010, 47(2–4) 267–284,

<sup>146</sup> Despite invitations to intervene in Sri Lanka in their war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), India chose to abstain from any military commitment. Later in Nepal, India was reluctant to intervene in the political crisis resulting in the overthrow of the monarchy, and subsequent formation of a Maoist government in the Himalayan kingdom. Similarly with regards to Bangladesh, India was tolerant towards frequent border skirmishes and refrained from exerting any political pressure on Dhaka. See Rajesh M. Basrur, “Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia,”

<sup>147</sup> Rajesh M. Basrur, “Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia,” *International Studies*,

<sup>148</sup> This case study on India’s strategic behaviour in the SCS has been discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

The existing material factor based analysis of India's foreign security behaviour fails to provide a convincing rationale for these changes. This shift in the Indian state's perception of its own material capabilities (military and navy), and interests in international politics (territorial security in South Asia and economic interest in the Asia-Pacific), and the ways in which the Indian political elite processes information about these material factors of international politics, cannot be explained without a constructivist reading of India's foreign security behavior. Constructivism offers alternative understandings of a number of central themes in international relations theory, including the relationship between state identity and interest. Ted Hopf notes that "meaningful behaviour or action ... (of states), is possible only within an inter-subjective social context."<sup>149</sup> That is to say, interest formation in international politics is an inter-subjective phenomenon and identity is a key determinant of state's actions and preferences. This article will seek to explore the inter-subjective social context for India's foreign security behaviour that is driving it further towards the Asia-Pacific region. It will be argued that the Indian state's pursuit of a *new* Asia-Pacific identity is at the heart of many changes in its foreign security behaviour (including those mentioned above).

The claim that the Indian state's external identity is undergoing a conscious shift towards becoming an "Asia-Pacific player" raises further important questions. How does the concept of identity operate in India's foreign policy behaviour? What was the cause of desire for a change, if there was a change, in India's external identity after the end of the Cold War? How has this desire been orchestrated in material practice by the Indian state? Towards this end the article will proceed in three parts. The first part will explain a theoretical understanding about the concept of identity in international politics. It will also identify how the concept of identity operates in India's foreign policy behaviour. The second part will seek to answer the central question of this paper: why did the Indian state aspire towards a new identity? The third part will analyse India's ongoing identity transformation process from a "South Asian power" to an "Asia-Pacific player" after the end of the Cold War with special emphasis on the visible trade-offs between the two identities.

The claim that international affairs are guided by more than the distribution of state capabilities is not original. It has long been a primary contestation of the post-positivist or critical IR movement that the world is mutually constitutive of material and ideational forces.<sup>150</sup> This article contributes to the existing body of literature on the role of *identity* in determining a state's foreign policy behaviour. To this end the interpretation of India's deepening engagement with the Asia-Pacific region as a desire to pursue a *new* identity is an original contribution of this article. The article aims to enrich the existing constructivist research program by examining the case of the Indian state's pursuit of a new identity in the

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<sup>149</sup> Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory" *International Security*, Volume 23, Number 1, Summer 1998, pp. 171-200

<sup>150</sup> IR constructivists have been most active in this regard. See, for example, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Onuf, "World of Our Making: Rules and Rule" in *Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989)

international system. The article will also enrich the growing body of literature on identity discourse in India's foreign policy behaviour.

## 4. 1 Conceptualization of Identity in International Politics

Scholars of international relations argue that states need a stable identity in order to be an actor in world politics. This need for a stable identity emanates primarily from two facts. First, identity establishes an "order" in world politics by ensuring some minimum level of predictable pattern of behavior among the states.<sup>151</sup> This predictability in state behavior is generated by the fact that every identity is ascribed a particular set of interests or preferences that identifies "self," and separates its meaning from "others" in international politics. That is to say the identity of an actor in international politics is the conception of "self" which is significantly different from the perception of "other."<sup>152</sup> A state understands others according to the identity it attributes to them, while simultaneously producing its own identity through daily material practices (choices and actions). Thus, interaction between inter-subjective identities of different states creates order in a socially constructed world.

The need for a stable identity also emanates from the fact that states in international politics have a goal of "recognition,"<sup>153</sup> along with their primary goal of "security."<sup>154</sup> The desire for recognition among states instinctively gives credence to the concept of identity in international politics because recognition is inter-subjectively linked to different identities. In a socially constructed world, states do not exist in a vacuum without an identity of their own, but instead they aspire to, or relate to, some specific identity in the international system. The desire for a particular identity is driven by their goal of recognition in international politics. Depending upon the type of recognition a state aspires to, there are different identities (within the international system) available for states to choose from, such as a great power, regional power, rogue state, responsible state etc. That is to say, recognition can be of positive and negative connotations. A state with a nuclear weapon and intentions to behave responsibly in compliance with the global nuclear order is recognized as a great power. States like India have aspired to this identity of great power in global politics. Even after exploding a nuclear bomb twice in 1974 and 1998 India has declared a no-first-use policy and has generated a

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<sup>151</sup> Alexander Wendt asserts that "Actors require identity – relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about the self – by participating in such collective meanings. See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International Organization*, (1992), 46, pp 391-25, pp 397

<sup>152</sup> Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security', in Peter Katzenstein, *Culture of National Security*, pp. 33–4.

<sup>153</sup> The claim that states want recognition is not new. See Erik Ringmar, "The Recognition Game: Soviet Russia Against the West," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 2 (June 2002): 115–36; Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State is Inevitable: Teleology and the Logic of Anarchy," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 491–542.

<sup>154</sup> Michelle Murray asserts that in addition to physical security states also want recognition. See Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War," *Security Studies*, 2010, 19:4, 656-88,

sustained communication to create its image as a “responsible state” within the international system. To the contrary, a state like North Korea which had also developed a clandestine nuclear weapons program demonstrates no such pretensions and has on a few occasions overtly threatened a nuclear attack against its regional nemesis. The difference in these approaches is primarily rooted in their respective desires for a particular type of recognition in the international system.

However, identity formation in international politics is not just a domestic process within a state.<sup>155</sup> Social identities are collective identities, and the meaning of identity is either shared or contested by actors within the social group. Therefore scholars of international relations assert that regardless of a state’s private aspiration to a particular identity, its social meaning depends on whether other states represent [it] in a “similar way”, and thus identity is, importantly, formed through a state’s external relations with others.<sup>156</sup> It is through social interaction with other actors that state identities are contested, made and reproduced.<sup>157</sup> That is to say, no matter to what extent states like Iran or North Korea aspire to an identity of a regional power or a nuclear weapons state respectively, they have not been successful in their endeavors, as the international community does not conform to their aspirations.

The Constructivist literature seems to be divided on the “sources” of conception of identity in international politics. The conventional constructivist’s emphasize external sources (inter-state relations) in a state’s identity formation process. The critical constructivists place greater emphasis on the role of domestic nationalist narratives in construing a state’s identity. This division appears more academic than practical as neither of these conceptions of identity is mutually exclusive or devoid of contest. Regardless of its source, a state’s identity formation process has to undergo both the external inter-state interaction process and the generation of domestic nationalist narratives to normalize the content of the identity. This article will acquiesce with the critical constructivist’s emphasis on the role of domestic motivation in construing the Indian state’s external identity.

## 4.2 Concept of Identity in India’s Foreign Policy Behavior

The conventional positivist approach to the study of India’s international relations has restricted any role for identity as a variable in the analysis of India’s foreign policy behaviour. This view accentuates the most cherished axiom of international politics, that security is the primary goal of states, and argues that the Indian state has sought to achieve this goal of security through various means. Scholars have noted various ideological schools

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<sup>155</sup> Constructivists observe that the producer of the identity is not in control of what it ultimately means to others; the inter-subjective structure is the final arbiter of meaning. See Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,”

<sup>156</sup> Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341–70.

<sup>157</sup> Michelle Murray, “Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War,”

in Indian strategic thinking. Kanti Bajpai identifies three paradigms of Indian strategic thinking: *Nehruvianism*, *neoliberalism* and *hyper-realism*, each characterised by differing attitudes towards internal security, regional security and relations with great powers.<sup>158</sup> The lacuna in this view is that it pays no attention to the motive of “recognition” in determining the Indian state’s external behaviour. Therefore this approach struggles to explain convincingly many aspects of Indian foreign policy behaviour such as what India aims to achieve from its nuclear weapons program.<sup>159</sup> Or what India was trying to secure for itself through Nehru’s “moral power” immediately after its independence.<sup>160</sup>

Nothing in the preceding narrative is new except that in existing literature “security” is treated as primary goal of the Indian state, and “recognition,” though important, is regarded as a secondary, or inconsequential, aspect of its foreign security behaviour. This article aims to treat “recognition” as an equally important goal as “security,” for the Indian state. The Indian state has constantly sought to maximize its “recognition” along with “security”. In fact it will not be an exaggeration to comment that at times the Indian state’s goal of “recognition” has increased the cost of its other goal of “security,” if not thoroughly compromised it. India’s intuitive desire to stand against the US-led “imperial West” (a socially constructed image) during the Cold War was an important reason for the dangerous arming of its traditional rival, Pakistan, thus permanently complicating its security environment on the sub-continent.

The Indian state has always aspired to recognition that confers a “status” and has sought to aspire to those identities that bring status.<sup>161</sup> This explains why India has pursued both paths of developing nuclear weapons and projecting moral power at different periods of its existence as an actor in the international system. The choice of nuclear weapons was associated with the aspirations of an identity of a great power and the choice of moral power in its foreign policy formulations was associated with the identity of an ideological power in global politics. Both these identities are perceived to offer some kind of status within the international system. In light of this argument it is safe to assert that what is fundamental in

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<sup>158</sup> Nehruvianism refers to the strategic world vision of India’s first Prime Minister J. L. Nehru who had tremendous influence on independent India’s approach towards international relations. See Kanti Bajpai, ‘Indian Strategic Culture’, in Michael R. Chambers, *South Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute 2002).

<sup>159</sup> Increasing numbers of scholars opine that “security” is not the primary motive for India’s nuclear weapons program. Moreover, India’s security was not enhanced after the recent nuclear explosions in late 1990s. See James Chiriyakandath, “Realigning India: Indian Foreign Policy after the Cold War,” *The Round Table*, Vol. 93, No. 374, 199–211, April 2004

<sup>160</sup> The claim that “moral power” enhances an individual state’s security in the traditional sense is debatable. There are many contemporary states which act as “moral superpowers” such as Canada and the Scandinavian states, but their notion of security is more a post-modern concept than as understood in a traditional sense. In contrast, the proponents of *Nehruvianism* in Indian foreign policy literature refer to the concept of security in the traditional sense.

<sup>161</sup> External observers note India’s desire for a status in international politics, which at times, is explicitly sought, even without relevant material power to justify such a claim. Stephen Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, 2001, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Bronson Percival, “India as an Asia-Pacific Power,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*,

India's foreign policy behaviour is aspiration to a particular identity that confers status. Subsequently the choice of identity that confers status, and the strategy to construe that identity, varied according to its material capabilities and structural position. But aspiration to an identity (that brings recognition) has been a fundamental feature of Indian foreign security behaviour.

The literature on identity discourse in India's foreign policy behaviour is growing, though; there is a clear inward focus of this discourse. The emphasis is to examine the complex interplay between domestic national identity formation and foreign policy behaviour. Geetika Commuri examines the impact of internal contestation between India's newly emerging religious-cultural identity as opposed to a secular conception of itself, on its external relations with Pakistan.<sup>162</sup> Priya Chacko examines the impact of post-colonial identity on India's foreign security behaviour.<sup>163</sup> Tobias F. Engelmeier examines the domestic identity formation within the Indian state and argues that foreign policy has been, and remains, an integral part of the country's nation-building project.<sup>164</sup> Chris Ogden develops a concept of India's "security identity" to explain the complex interplay between India's domestic political development and external behaviour in the international system.<sup>165</sup> This article aims to deviate from the inward focus of existing literature on India's identity and focuses on conceptualization of India's external identity within the international system.

An important challenge in explicating the role of identity in India's foreign policy behaviour is the question of multiple or conflicting identities. Given the fact that India is a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural nation with fiercely competitive domestic politics, some may argue whether the Indian state has one single external identity. In this regard it is important to note that every actor, including states in international politics, has multiple identities that only become salient in certain contexts. Recognizing fully that India has multiple social identities<sup>166</sup> in the domestic context, the Indian state has managed to construct and project a single identity in international politics, depending upon the prevailing contemporary political perception in New Delhi.<sup>167</sup> For example Nehru's India in the early 1950s was a universalist, idealist, moralist, anti-colonial, non-aligned India; whereas the

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<sup>162</sup> See for instance Gitika Commuri, "The Relevance of National Identity Narratives in Shaping Foreign Policy The Case of India-Pakistan Relations" *Journal of South Asian Development*, July/December 2009 vol. 4 no. 2 161-202.

<sup>163</sup> Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy : The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004* Taylor and Francis publications, June 2013,

<sup>164</sup> Tobias F. Engelmeier, *Nation-building and Foreign Policy in India: An Identity-Strategy Conflict*, Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009. Pp. 304.

<sup>165</sup> Chris Ogden, *Post-Colonial, Pre-BJP: The Normative Parameters of India's Security Identity, 1947-1998*, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, (2009) 17:2, 215-237,

<sup>166</sup> For a detailed look at multiple social identities in India and the larger South Asian region see Robert C Oberst; Yogendra K Malik; Charles Kennedy; Ashok Kapur; Mahendra Lawoti; Syedur Rahman; Ahrar Ahmad; *Government and Politics in South Asia* Westview Press, July 2013,

<sup>167</sup> For strategic world views of the Indian political elite and continuity across the domestic political parties on the strategic world view see Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, "Institutions and World Views in Indian Foreign Security Policy," *India Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2012, pp. 76-94

identity of 1980's India was of a hegemonic South-Asian power.<sup>168</sup> This success in managing to project a single identity in the international system is explained by the low electoral salience of Indian foreign policy in its domestic politics, and in the high encapsulation of its central foreign affairs and defence bureaucracies. Stephen Cohen has noted that Indian foreign policy is dominated by a small strategic elite concentrated in New Delhi.<sup>169</sup> This elite nature of Indian foreign policy decision making has contributed towards relative ease in projecting a single external identity by the Indian state.

During the Cold War India successfully projected two different identities at different periods of international politics – the identity of a “leader of the third world states” and an identity of a “South Asian power”. Though there is evidence of several other overlapping identities being claimed or reflected by the Indian state such as an “Asianist identity,” or an identity of a “moral power,” the above mentioned two identities were the most predominant and sustained in its domestically generated narratives on foreign policy. The process of identity construction by the Indian state commenced immediately after its emergence as an independent actor in international politics. The newly independent Indian state had two goals of security and recognition in the international system. Once India's precarious post-independence security situation was stabilized, its political elite had to grapple with the challenge of crafting an external identity for the Indian state within the international system.

During the first two decades of its independence the focus of the Indian state's identity construction was to accomplish the goal of enhancing its recognition, and security maximization had taken a backseat in its foreign policy behavior.<sup>170</sup> Towards this end India's foreign policy establishment explored and experimented with several new ideas and projected them externally within the international system. One such idea was of India's “Asiatic” identity where, in the early 1950s, the Indian political elite, in the tradition of their anti-colonial national movement, displayed a strong desire to come closer to China and the other Asian countries in the name of common values explicitly in opposition to the West.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> These inferences are drawn about India's identity based on India's self proclaimed “role,” and role-related practices in international politics. This is an acknowledged practice in the Constructivist research program. See Mlada Bukovansky, “American Identity and Neutral Rights from Independence to the War of 1812,” *International Organization*, 51 (1997), pp. 209–43. For evidence of India's ‘role’ mentioned in this argument see Rajesh M. Basrur, “Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia,”

<sup>169</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, p. 50; Also see Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, “Institutions and World Views in Indian Foreign Security Policy,”; See George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, and Itty Abraham, “India's ‘Strategic Enclave’: Civilian Scientists and Military Technologies,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1992), pp. 231–52.

<sup>170</sup> Military experts opine that security maximization was certainly not a priority in the first two decades of Indian foreign security behaviour. Many evidences suggest that India lacked “interest” rather than “capability” in aspiring for a role of regional power in South Asia during this period. India was at least a decade late in seeking cooperation of a superpower, had politely refused both American and Soviet proposal for help in military armament, and had settled for a policy of parity in terms of conventional military strength with Pakistan, its primary strategic adversary till then. See D. K. Palit, “India as an Asian Military Power,” *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1975), pp. 35–47

<sup>171</sup> For a discussion on India's attempt to carve out an “Asiatic identity” in early 1950s see Christophe Jaffrelot, “India's Look East Policy: An Asianist Strategy in Perspective” *India Review*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 2003, pp 35–68

Another related but distinct idea was the idea of non-alignment in international politics that gained strength in the late 1950s and culminated in the creation of a formal organization – Non Alignment Movement (NAM) – in 1961. The successes received by such ideas were variable. While the former idea of Asiatic identity failed miserably in the 1950s and commenced the beginning of India's long retreat from Asia (that ended in the 1990s), the other idea of non- alignment had some success, at least at the level of rhetoric in global politics. Though there was considerable overlapping in the scope and meaning of these ideas, and in the membership of states subscribing to these ideas, still they were different in scope, and contributed towards the larger "self-image" sought by the Indian state – the identity of a leader of third world states within the international system.

In 1962, India faced the most grave foreign policy challenge of its existence as an independent actor in the international system – the humiliation of a lopsided military defeat by China. The Indian state's twin goals of security and recognition in the international system were severely tested. On the one hand India's security was permanently compromised and simultaneously on the other hand there was a significant impact on India's cherished external identity of a leader of the third world. The immediate and most obvious impact of this military defeat was a complete overhaul of India's defence system. Since then the Indian state has carved out a new identity for itself – the identity of a "South Asian power" – that conveys the meaning of a regional power. In the conventional realist world view, this was more a case of a transition towards a realist focus of international relations where security is considered as the only goal of states in the international system.<sup>172</sup> The Indian state's intuitive need to resurrect its external identity in the international system after this military drubbing from China is under emphasized in this analysis. That is to say, though the realist analysis accepts the impact of China-invasion on India's collective national psyche, yet it fails to acknowledge the need for constructing a new identity that could satisfy the Indian state's conception about its "self" – an identity that could satiate the other goal of recognition. Therefore it is argued here that the Indian state attempted to construe an identity of "South Asian power" after the China debacle to compensate for the crisis in its previous identity (leader of the third world). As a consequence India claimed (and acted) the role of South Asia's regional power which constructed its identity as South Asia's regional power.<sup>173</sup> It was through this identity of a South Asian power that the Indian state sought to restore the status and recognition which was battered after the China war.

The constructivist account of international politics emphasizes that states produce and reproduce their identities through material and social practices. India, in pursuance of its identity of a South Asian power, demonstrated a penchant for strategically asserting itself over other states of the region. The period witnessed the reign of India's two most strategically assertive Prime Ministers – Indira Gandhi (1966-1984) and Rajiv Gandhi (1984-

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<sup>172</sup> Stephen P. Cohen uses the phrase "militant Nehruvianism" to describe the hard-nosed policies pursued by the Indian state from 1966-1984. See S. Cohen *India: Emerging Power*,

<sup>173</sup> India's self identification as a South Asia power is based on "role" based analyses – a practice acknowledged in the constructivist research program.

1989), and its interventionist and muscle flexing behavior in South Asia reached its peak in the 1980s. India overtly threatened Pakistan through a provocative military exercise, Operation Brasstacks (1987), and orchestrated a peace accord with Sri Lanka that facilitated a peacekeeping role for the Indian military in Sri Lanka (1987). It strangled Nepal (1989) by closing all border points and denying a transit to Nepalese goods and trade thus forcing Nepal to give in to India's genuine security concerns, and finally militarily intervened in the Maldives (1988) to upstage a coup against India's friendly regime. The meaning and content of this identity was internalized by media reports in India (and abroad) that reflected the hegemonic content of this identity.<sup>174</sup>

Apart from these material practices there were several social practices that construed the Indian state's identity of a South Asian power. South Asia is a vast territory (primarily land mass) spread between the Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south, comprising seven independent states, with India being the largest. Geography formed the primary basis of this new external identity for India. Geography's influence on India's identity is discernible in two distinct ways. The first influence is defining the geographical context of India's identity. It is to say, the geographical fact of India's belongingness to the South Asian region prescribes that India is a South Asian state.

Geography also shaped the knowledgeable practices of the statecraft unique to the region. The region is ascribed with a collective preference of "shadow of security over politics and economics."<sup>175</sup> This explains a mutually shared content of identity of South Asian states where in almost all states of the region, security takes precedence over every other aspect of their external behavior. This norm can be regarded as a cognitive norm of South Asian state identity – meaning that regardless of a level of difference in internalization of this norm among all the South Asian states, it forms an unconscious, unquestioned, integral part of social meaning of their identity. India, though a notable exception from other South Asian states with an established democratic polity, and a relatively larger functioning economy, could not liberate itself from its fixation with security on all other forms of international politics. This reflects the cognitive norm of being a South Asian state.

Geography also defined the limits and boundaries of India's strategic geography and required the attention of Indian security planners. George Tanham in his seminal essay on India's strategic thought noted the effect of geography in contributing to India's "insular perspective and a tradition of localism and particularism."<sup>176</sup> This explains the Indian state's emphasis on

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<sup>174</sup> The hegemonic tone in media analysis and reports during the period under review was clearly discernible. See Nicholas, Ashford, "India: 'Rajiv doctrine' masks strong-arm tactics." *The Ottawa Citizen* (1989, Apr 22). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/239284270?accountid=14700>; Also see "Cautious Optimism," *India Today*, August 31, 1987, p. 69

<sup>175</sup> Experts agree that in South Asia there is a shadow of security over politics and economy. This norm is mutually shared by all states in South Asia. See

[http://www.watsoninstitute.org/event\\_type.cfm?id=86#sthash.tXWleTvZ.dpuf](http://www.watsoninstitute.org/event_type.cfm?id=86#sthash.tXWleTvZ.dpuf)

<sup>176</sup> George Tanham's seminal essay on India's strategic thought in the early 1990s generated a wide reaction among the Indian strategic community. See George Tanham, *India's Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Publications, 1992).

continental security and preference for land based military over naval power in its security planning.

The geographical asymmetry and Indo-centricity of the region has also shaped the beliefs of the Indian strategic community towards the role of “power” in ordering the region. This obsession with “power” (or absence of power) is aptly reflected in the Indian domestic political context where the Hindu Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is associated with a notion of “strong power” and the current ruling Congress party is referred to as a “weak power” in terms of expressing India’s strategic interests.<sup>177</sup> Without accepting or rejecting the significance of this underlining obsession with power, its roots can be linked to India’s geographical primacy in a relatively closed region of South Asia.

Another norm of South Asian international politics that can be regarded as a constitutive norm of their collective identity is their collective penchant to be identified as “developing states” in the international system. Hewitt and Lewitt in their work *The New International Politics of South Asia* note: “the status, and to an extent self-identification of the South Asia states as “developing states” is central to an understanding of their domestic, regional, and foreign policy, and still serves (especially in the case of India) as a self conscious reference point through which to carve out a particular global identity.”<sup>178</sup> This notion of being a developing state has shaped the Indian state’s (along with all South Asian State’s) views about the politics, economics, and security in the international system. This norm can easily be characterized as a *world view* of collective identity shared by South Asian states. South Asian states share a sense of being a “developing state” which gives their respective political elites some kind of cushion from adopting a pragmatic approach in their domestic and international affairs.<sup>179</sup> This cognitive model formed the basis of India’s leadership in “third worldism”<sup>180</sup> during the 1980s.

India’s claim to its identity of a South Asian power was not without contest. This claim has been resented by all the smaller states of South Asia and openly challenged by its western neighbor Pakistan. The contestation between India’s conceptions of self as a “South Asia

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<sup>177</sup> There is a strong view in India of associating the BJP as a more aggressive and strategically assertive political party than the leftist-centrist Congress party. See for instance Sumit Ganguly, “India’s Pathway to Pokharan II: The Prospects and Sources of New Delhi’s Nuclear Weapons Program” *International Security* 23 no. 4, (Spring 1999): 174. Also See Jerome, M. Conley, *Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation Lessons and Options for U.S.*, Lexington Books (2001) pp. 96

<sup>178</sup> Vernon Hewitt, and Vernon Marston Lewitt, “Introduction” *The New International Politics of South Asia* Manchester University Press (1997), pp 3,

<sup>179</sup> This inference has been drawn from many writings on the political culture in the region and about developing states. Mohammad Ayoob for instance seeks to explain the security predicament of the states in the region by focusing on the question of evolution of the modern nation-state. According to Ayoob, European states have taken six to seven centuries to emerge as fully fledged nation-states, where as the developing world is expected to complete the whole process in just a few decades. This kind of self-appeasing justification is a predominant norm in South Asian international relations. See Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and International System*, (1995) Boulder CO.: Lynne Rienner.

<sup>180</sup> India has for long sought the leadership of the third world under various guises such as non-alignment and developing nation grouping. For India’s third worldism in 1980s and relative disdain after the 1990s, see C Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: India’s New Foreign Policy*

power” and other South Asian states is widely noted by experts on international relations of South Asia.<sup>181</sup>

The Indian state sought to secure its cherished goal of “recognition” during the Cold War phase of international politics through this identity of a “South Asian power.” It projected itself as a South Asian power not only within the region but even beyond in its global setting. India’s relation with the rest of the world was as a South Asian power, reflective of its claim of a leadership position within the region. It is important to note that India’s claim of this identity has been acknowledged by the international community.<sup>182</sup>

The preceding analysis has demonstrated how the concept of identity operates in India’s foreign security behavior. It argues that the Indian state’s external identity projection has sought to achieve its twin goals of security and recognition during the cold war. It also explained the constitutive and cognitive norms of India’s identity as a “South Asian power.” The following section will analyze the central claim of this article that the systemic changes imposed by the end of the Cold War have precipitated another significant change in India’s external identity. The strategy to accomplish this task is first by re-assessing the impact of the end of the Cold War on the Indian state’s “self-conception,” as it will help to explain the basis for desire for change in India’s external identity, and then later exploring the desire for an Asia-Pacific identity.

### 4.3 End of the Cold War: Crisis of “Security” or Crisis of “Identity”

It is widely accepted that since the end of the cold war India has undergone significant changes in its economic and foreign security thinking.<sup>183</sup> As a consequence of this change India has adopted domestic economic reforms at home, and a pragmatic approach to its external policy. Indian diplomacy was reinvigorated with economic and strategic considerations, and a determined effort was launched to expand India’s influence beyond its geographical boundaries. It is argued that the Asia-Pacific region was one such region which beckoned India to reassert its claim for a say in the affairs of the region.

This is standard narrative of mainstream literature on India’s foreign security behavior and is based on two underlying assumptions about how structural changes induced by the end of

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<sup>181</sup> See Robert C Oberst; Yogendra K Malik; Charles Kennedy; Ashok Kapur; Mahendra Lawoti; Syedur Rahman; Ahrar Ahmad; *Government and Politics in South Asia* Westview Press, July 2013, Robert Stewart-Ingersoll and Derrick Frazier, India as a Regional Power: Identifying the Impact of Roles and Foreign Policy Orientation on the South Asian Security Order, *Asian Security*, (2010), 6:1, 51-73, Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14799850903472003>

<sup>182</sup> For example India’s role in orchestrating the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord (1987) as a regional guarantor of peace and stability was accepted by the United States. Also, states of the ASEAN region accepted India as a large South Asian Power. See Tan Tai Yong & See Chak Mun, “The Evolution of India–ASEAN Relations,” *India Review*, (2009), 8:1, 20-42,

<sup>183</sup> For post Cold War revolution in Indian strategic thinking see C Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy*,

Cold War have affected Indian strategic thinking. The first assumption is that the end of the Cold War has posed a serious “crisis of security” for the Indian state. The second assumption is that the structural reordering in the post Cold War world order has offered incentives (interests) to the Indian state to seek new engagement with extra regional states and great powers of international system. These assumptions are an obvious outcome of dominance of material-factor based analysis in this narrative. How these structural changes have affected India’s “self-conception” is under examined in this analysis. It is important to inquire whether there was any crisis in the Indian political elite’s conception about its “self” at the end of the Cold War. Given the fact that structural changes brought by the end of the Cold War have affected different states differently,<sup>184</sup> there is a valid reason to enquire if the end of the Cold War posed a “crisis of security” or a “crisis of identity” for the Indian state.

During the Cold War, India’s security, like that of most other regions of the world was subject to strategic rivalry between the two super-powers. Yet it was not intricately linked in a manner similar to some other regions of the world such as Europe, East Asia, or South East Asia, where security was predicated on the presence of external military bases that had artificially maintained peace. Such regions had witnessed either a dramatic implosion brought by the collapse of state structures, or an explosion of regional hostilities, or at least generated a tangible threat of such hostilities, after the retreat of super-powers. India did not experience any such security threats at the end of the Cold War. In fact the Indian Prime Minister’s historic visit to China just at the end of the Cold War enunciated a thaw in relations with India’s primary strategic adversary. The only major security challenge in this period was of domestic (albeit, foreign sponsored) insurgency in Kashmir, which cannot be linked as an outcome of Cold War politics. Therefore it will not be an exaggeration to assert that at the end of the Cold War, though security was not in plenty, still there was not a “crisis of security” for the Indian state.

Contrarily, the crisis was more discernible on the collective cognition of the Indian political elite about its “self,” and the “other” (rest of the world) in global politics. The victory of the “imperial west” has dismantled the very basis of the Indian state’s self conception as a power that needs to obstruct, if not challenge, the advancement of western imperialism among the third world states. Conversely, it demolished a major source of “status” for India in the international system. It is important to note that India’s domestic discourses on its foreign policy drew immeasurable prestige for its leadership role in leading and mobilizing third world states against “immoral” western capitalism. The realist narrative on India’s post Cold War revolution in strategic thinking though, acknowledges this crisis but categorizes it as a change in “interests” rather than a crisis in its self-conception.

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<sup>184</sup> The end of the Cold War has simultaneously resulted in a crisis of security and a crisis of identity for different states. While for many states in East Europe, Africa and Asia, it appeared as a direct threat to their security, for many other states such as Russia there was a serious crisis of identity in the post Cold War world order. The end of the Cold War has also significantly contributed to a “transformation of identity” of states like China with the emergence of a “threatening China image” discourse in the US strategic world view. See for instance Oliver Turner, ““Threatening” China and US security: the international politics of identity” *Review of International Studies*, (2013), 39, 903–924

There is a need to re-conceptualize this realist assessment. What changed at the end of the Cold War was not the “interests” but the “self-conception” of the Indian state, where it found difficulties in relating to the changed realities of global politics through its previous strategic world view. This is exactly what it should mean when an Indian realist C. Raja Mohan comments that “the country has begun to move towards a new set of assumptions about the nature of its interaction with the world.”<sup>185</sup> Such a transition towards a new set of assumptions, which Mohan refers to as an “unlearning behaviour of Indian foreign policy,” cannot happen without change in their self-conception and without the eventuality of a new identity formation for the Indian state. History of international relations is replete with evidence where self-conception of many states has undergone radical changes at the time of tumultuous systemic changes. The transformation of post war Germany and Japan from a revisionary power to a pacifist state cannot be explained without the change in their “self-conception.” The natural fallout was a change in their respective identity in global politics.<sup>186</sup> The Indian state also experienced a similar impact on its self-conception at the end of the Cold War where all possible sources of “recognition” within international system were exhausted. It was a change in India’s self-conception that led to a subsequent change in its perception towards “interests” in international politics. In the Indian political elite’s collective cognition, India’s only remaining identity of a South Asian power was not enough to secure recognition and status in global politics.<sup>187</sup> There was an urgent need for a new identity for the Indian state which could secure recognition and status within the international system. It was clearly a case of a “crisis of identity” rather than a “crisis of security” that forced the Indian political elite to innovate and change its traditional foreign policy orientation.

This crisis of identity for the Indian state was further exacerbated by the grim reality of the post Cold War world order, where China, India’s primary strategic adversary, was elevated to second most powerful state in the international system. For reasons right or wrong China’s international status was elevated in an unprecedented manner after the end of the Cold War.<sup>188</sup> This new development in international politics had a compelling effect on the Indian state’s quest for recognition, and desire for a new identity that could secure recognition and status within the international system. The Indian political elite found itself in a similar quandary as immediately after India’s independence when they needed to construe an identity for the newly created state.

It was in this critical phase that several new ideas were being experimented with in Indian strategic thinking (like in the 1950s) to craft a new identity for itself. One such idea was to continue with the previous identity of an anti-western power in the form of a trilateral

<sup>185</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “Introduction,” *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy*.

<sup>186</sup> Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press (1998); P.J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Post-war Japan*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (1996a)

<sup>187</sup> India’s post Cold War political elite repeatedly expresses its dismay over India’s strategic confinement within South Asia during the Cold War.

<sup>188</sup> It would be incorrect to assume that China’s status in international politics has been elevated purely on its growing economic power. Rather it is its potentially threatening image (identity) to the current world order that is responsible for the rise of its status in the international system.

security partnership between India, China and Russia. Though this idea did not gain traction it does point towards the Indian state's search for a new identity which could maximize its status and recognition within the international system. It was during this phase of the search for a new identity that the notion of an identity of an Asia-Pacific player began stretching within Indian strategic thinking. In the mid 1990s this aspiration was more latent as expressed by Indian analyst Bhabhani Sen Gupta, who was also the adviser of the then Indian Prime Minister I. K. Gujral. Gupta asserts:

India should break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia, a region with no strategic resources, overburdened with poverty and population, and still a victim of the fault-lines of the British Empire. India must go East in search of an Asia-Pacific identity and of larger areas of collaboration with the tigers and dragons, and with China and Japan<sup>189</sup>

#### 4.4 Why an Asia-Pacific identity?

The preceding analysis raises two important questions. Why a desire for an Asia-Pacific identity and, if this is the case, then why was India's prior attempt at an "Asiatic identity" (in 1950s) not a greater resource in the construction of this "Look East" approach? In this regard it is submitted that scholars concur that "it is almost a conventional wisdom that the centre of gravity of global politics has shifted from Europe to the Asia-Pacific in recent years."<sup>190</sup> The conventional wisdom suggests that the change was evident in terms of geo-economic and geo-strategic perspectives of international politics. But the change was not just limited to these factors. Rather the change was also evident in terms of "recognition and status" being attributed to the Asia-Pacific region within global politics.

This change in gravity of global politics has become visible immediately after the end of the Cold War. The states of East Asia and South East Asia have demonstrated immense economic growth in the years leading up to the end of the Cold War, thus replicating the economic performance of the Euro-Atlantic zone. This economic growth was underpinned by trade and globalization. Similarly the region was experimenting with ideas of regionalism and multilateralism (in the form of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)) that has been previously tested in the Euro-Atlantic zone (in the form of NAFTA and the EU). Last but not least the region harboured the most serious traditional and non-traditional threats to international security. The pending security disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, combined with the rapidly rising capabilities of the states involved in these

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<sup>189</sup> Bhabhani Sen Gupta, speaking further about the then Prime Minister I. K. Gujral's world views, comments that "Though Gujral has not spoken directly about a foreign policy 'doctrine', his thoughts and actions lend themselves to a conceptualized and methodical attempt to place India centre stage in the Asia-Pacific region, and hence in global affairs." See Bhabhani Sen Gupta, "India in the Twenty-First Century," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 73, No. 2, Asia and the Pacific (Apr., 1997), pp. 297-14

<sup>190</sup> Harsh V. Pant (2007): *India in the Asia-Pacific: Rising Ambitions with an Eye on China*; Rod Lyon, and Christine Leah, *Global jigsaw: ASPI's strategic assessment 2008* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute), 2008. P 41.

disputes, and different security alliances that guaranteed the involvement of the United States, the lone super-power of world politics in these regional disputes, ensured that the region gained the maximum attention of global security experts. These factors have imparted great “recognition” to the region, of the idea, or concept, of “Asia-Pacific,” in the global political discourse. The fact (or a socially constructed image) that the next big question in the high politics of power, security, or ideology, will be contested in the Asia-Pacific has ascribed a “status” to the identity of being an Asia-Pacific player. This analysis about status and recognition being ascribed to the concept of “Asia-Pacific” gains traction from increasing scholarly convergence that the concept of Asia-Pacific is a compound of both ideational and material factors.<sup>191</sup>

The concept of Asia-Pacific was not an altogether new concept in post Cold War international politics. Scholars are of the opinion that this concept is a revival of, or linked to, the concept of “Pacific Century” that has animated the discourse of international politics since the late nineteenth century and attained maturity in the late 1980s just before the end of the Cold War. While the current discourse of “Asia-Pacific” is underpinned by the rise of China,<sup>192</sup> the previous discourse of “Pacific Century” was based on the leadership of Japan. The “Pacific Century” concept has its genesis in Japan in the writings of Japanese diplomat, Inagaki Manjiro (1890), who advanced the belief that the coming twentieth century would herald the dawning of a “Pacific Age” (later recast in Western discourse as “Pacific Century”). This concept of “Pacific Century” reached maturity when Japan’s economic miracle had spread to the “Asian Tigers” of Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and American trade with this Pacific world has overtaken its trans-Atlantic commerce for the first time in late 1980s.<sup>193</sup>

There is strong evidence to suggest that a sense of “status and recognition” was ascribed even to the concept of “Pacific Century” in its previous guise (similar to its current guise of Asia-Pacific century). Since the 1980s the Pacific Age rhetoric has spread to the smaller countries of Asia, and imperialistic overtones were replaced by a sense of community.<sup>194</sup> Many smaller

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<sup>191</sup> Thomas Wilkins asserts that “this concept is at once both a political/ideological project and a reified intellectual frame of reference.” See Thomas Wilkins, “The new “Pacific Century” and the rise of China: an international relations perspective” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 381405, August 2010

<sup>192</sup> Scholars are of opinion that the current guise of Asia-Pacific century with the “Asia-” prefix attached to the previous concept of “Pacific Century,” is underwritten by a concern over the implications of the rise of China, and Asia in general. See Bill Emmott, *Rivals: how the power struggle between China, India and Japan will shape our next decade* (New York: Mariner Books). 2009; Parag Khanna, *The second world: empires and influence in the new world order* (New York: Random House), 2008; Kishore Mahbubani, *The new Asian hemisphere: the irresistible shift of global power to the east* (New York: Public Affairs), 2008,

<sup>193</sup> Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, “Whatever happened to the Pacific Century?”, *Review of International Studies*, 1999, 25(5): 245-69.

<sup>194</sup> See from the Philippines: Jose P. Leviste, Jr., ed., *The Pacific Lake: Philippine Perspectives on a Pacific Community* (Manila: Philippine Council for Foreign Relations, 1986); from Malaysia: Arifin Bey, *Ajia-Taihei? no jidai* (Tokyo: Ch?? K?ronsha, 1987); from Singapore: Lau Teik Soon and Leo Suryadinata, eds., *Moving into the Pacific Century* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1988); from Argentina: Carlos J. Moneta, *Japon y America Latina en los a?os noventa* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991); from Fiji: School of Social and Economic Development, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993).

Asian states (South East Asia) have enunciated a drive to look further east,<sup>195</sup> as a part of bandwagoning with the rhetoric of “Pacific Century”.<sup>196</sup> Smaller states (lesser powers) as members of a larger community felt the same elation that the bigger powers experience from this kind of rhetoric. Experts note that there has emerged an unmistakable search for a “new group identity” among the Pacific-Asian countries since mid 1980s.<sup>197</sup>

This was a period when India hosted a number of Southeast Asian leaders like Suharto of Indonesia, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Mahathir Mohammad of Malaysia, Van Linh of Vietnam and Hun Sen of Kampuchea, besides Foreign and other Ministers as well as junior officials from these countries.<sup>198</sup> It is unlikely that the Indian political elite would have remained ignorant about the sense of status drawn by these states from their aspirations of a new group identity in the Asia-Pacific region. Though it is difficult to speculate whether these developments in the Asia-Pacific had any impact on the Indian political elite’s collective cognition, the Indian state’s new choices of action (late 1980s onwards) on its economy, trade, and outreach to the United States and “Look East”, suggest so.<sup>199</sup>

The end of the Cold War and rise of China and its international status (and the relative slowdown of Japan) has imperceptibly changed the narrative of discourse on the Asia-Pacific century in terms of who will lead this “Pacific Century” and what will be its implications on global politics. But what has not changed, and is instead re-emphasized, is the fact that the centre of gravity of global politics is intricately linked to the Western Pacific Ocean. The ideological and material project attached to the Pacific Ocean attracts significant status and recognition in global politics.

It is this fact of political discourse around the Pacific Ocean that explains the Indian strategic community’s latent desire to seek an Asia-Pacific identity as it offered to satiate the Indian state’s goal of recognition in the international system. While the inspiration to look towards the East animated within Indian political elite’s cognitive thinking during late 1980s, it became an urgent desire after the end of the Cold War when the Indian state’s self-conception (identity) was seriously challenged. This is the reason that India intuitively launched its Look East Policy (LEP) in 1991 (officially announced in 1994) and the policy has been termed as a

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<sup>195</sup> Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad started to advocate a ‘Look East policy’ in 1981. See Lim Huang Sing, *Japan's Role in ASEAN: Issues and Prospects* (Singapore: Times, 1994).

<sup>196</sup> Pekka Korhonen, “The Pacific Age in World History,” *Journal of World History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (spring, 1996), pp. 41-70. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078658>

<sup>197</sup> Pekka Korhonen, “The Pacific Age in World History,”

<sup>198</sup> For details, see MEA Annual Reports of 1985-85 to 1989-90. Also *Speeches and Writings of Rajiv Gandhi*, All Volumes (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India). Cited by S. D. Muni, “India’s ‘Look East’ Policy: The Strategic Dimension,”

<sup>199</sup> Sumit Ganguly and Rahul Mukherji note the origin of several features of India’s post Cold War strategic thinking in the previous decade of 1980s, and emphasize that structural change alone cannot fully explain the changes that came about, without understanding the role of individual leaders (political elites) in making those choices that precipitated the change. I argue that the developments in the Asia-Pacific were the key source in influencing the choices made by India’s individual political leaders in late 1980s and 1990s. See Sumit Ganguly & Rahul Mukherji *India Since 1980* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011 ISBN: 978-0-521-67804-9 (paperback) p.55

“strategic shift towards the East” by current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.<sup>200</sup> Even external media reports have noted India’s desire for an Asia-Pacific identity, and the role of status and recognition that comes attached with this identity, in driving India’s surge towards the East, when a media report in China commented about LEP as “India’s desire to be a colourful power of Asia-Pacific.”<sup>201</sup>

India’s post Cold War turn towards an Asia-Pacific identity was remarkably different from its previous attempt at Asiatic identity in 1950s. There is a clear difference between the genealogy of the Asiatic identity and the Asia-Pacific identity. While the previous identity was confined to the newly liberated post colonial states of East and South East Asia the current narrative of Asia-Pacific identity was based on geo-strategic significance of the Pacific Ocean. In the previous identity project the dominant narrative was based on the rhetoric of anti-western, anti-imperialism, and anti-colonial ideology, which is non-existent in this current identity project. The region had taken a permanent shift towards trade, globalization, and US-led security systems during the Cold War, and if India wanted any meaningful engagement with the region then it had to be based on the narratives of trade, globalization, and security. Moreover the previous Asiatic identity project was based on the Indian political elite’s self conception of China as an equal and friendly great power of Asia (along with India) and it was assumed that both India and China would have an equal role in mobilising Asian states against the West. History is evident that all such pretensions of Indian political elites were expunged in the Cold War politics. First the post war economic development of Japan and its leadership role in Asia (especially till the late 1980s) replaced China in the Indian political elite’s collective cognition as a leading power of Asia. Second, in the changed realities of the post Cold War world order, China has transformed into India’s primary strategic adversary that competes for the Indian state’s two cherished goals of “security” and “recognition.” Therefore in the Indian political elite’s collective cognition any new identity formation project for the Indian state cannot be in alliance with China. It does not necessarily mean that there has to be defiance of China (a claim repeatedly made by the Indian political elite) but certainly there cannot be an alliance on the basis of the first principals of Enlightenment, as sought by previous attempts of the Asiatic identity. It is for these reasons that India’s new Look East approach could not be constructed on its previous Asiatic identity concept of the 1950s.

## 4.5 India’s Asia-Pacific Identity Project

Nothing in the above analyses intends to suggest that Indian diplomacy toward other regions and global fronts was less imaginative or less successful. India’s post Cold War political elite was determined to demonstrate *realpolitik* in its engagement with all other areas of external

<sup>200</sup> Manmohan Singh, ‘Address at the 16th Asian Corporate Conference,’ Mumbai, March 18, 2006. Available at <http://www.rediff.com/money/2006/mar/18asoc.htm>

<sup>201</sup> “US, Japan, ROK and India Want to Enter Southeast Asia,” *People’s Daily*, December 15, 2003. Cited by David Scot, “Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia”

diplomacy. The aim is to suggest that the critical mass of Indian strategic thinking was driven by aspirations of transforming India into an Asia-Pacific player. As constructivists argue that states construct their identity through material and social practices, the Indian state's desire for its Asia-Pacific identity was to be construed through processes engaging it with the region.

The following section will analyze how India's Asia-Pacific identity project gained traction in its external behavior. It will refer to three important aspects of India's Asia-Pacific identity formation process – India's internal desire to craft an Asia-Pacific identity, the role of inter-state interactions in the Asia-Pacific region, and a special mention of the role of the United States in facilitating India's Asia-Pacific identity formation process. While the first two factors were helpful in defining and normalizing the content of India's Asia-Pacific identity among member states, the third factor was critical in manipulating the external contestation in India's identity-formation process. It is through this process of content generation and contestation that the Indian state's Asia-Pacific identity was to be construed and reaffirmed in international politics.

From very beginning India's image as a South Asian power that had a proclivity to strategically assert itself within South Asia, and had a relatively closed economy, was going to be a major obstacle in the improvement of India's relations with the states of the region. This image was further deteriorated by an unexplained rationale for its naval expansion just before the end of the Cold War. While the end of the Cold War created necessary strategic space for a reordering of India's relations with the states of the Asia-Pacific region, any possible reordering could not be materialised without shedding this inimical image. Therefore one important task for the reinvigorated Indian diplomacy was to construct a new image for the Indian state – an image that was neither threatening, nor of a power that would be a drag on the region's collective pace towards economic progress. The subsequent Indian strategic behaviour in the region was orchestrated in a manner to create a new image for the Indian state. Towards this end, discursive power has played an overarching role over the Indian state's material practices in the region, so as to create a favourable image among the states of the region.

Engagement and state-interaction is a key process through which states create a desirable image for themselves, in relation to "others" within this mutual engagement. India's formal attempt to engage with the Asia-Pacific region in the post Cold War period commenced with the launch of LEP in 1991 which was officially announced in 1994 when the Indian Prime Minister, P. V. Narsimha Rao, explained the rationale of policy to an international audience in a lecture delivered at Singapore. Rao stated:

"The Asia-Pacific could be the springboard for our leap into the global market place .... I am happy to have had this opportunity to enunciate my belief in this vision of a new relationship between India and the Asia-Pacific from Singapore, which I consider

the geographic and symbolic centre of the Asia-Pacific. I trust this vision will be realized.... and that the next century will be a century of partnership for all of us.”<sup>202</sup>

It was implicit in this speech that in the Indian political elite’s collective cognition, India was not a part of the Asia-Pacific region then. The then socially constructed image of the Indian state (among the states of South East Asia), was definitely of an actor in international politics which was external to the Asia-Pacific region. This lecture also accentuated the fact that from its very inception the aim of LEP was to engage with the entire Asia-Pacific region, contrary to claims that LEP was primarily aimed to enhance India’s cooperation with only the South East Asian states.<sup>203</sup> Such claims were further bolstered by India’s later announcement of the second stage of LEP in 2003 with the stated ambition of expanding its relations beyond South East Asia towards East Asia and the Pacific region.<sup>204</sup> This announcement has led to a view that the Indian political elite’s perception towards the East was sequential, and constricted by India’s material capabilities. This aberration is a natural outcome of domination of material-factor based analysis of Indian foreign security behavior. Contrary to this view, the ideational explanation of Indian foreign security behavior towards the East suggests that from very beginning the Indian political elite was driven by a latent desire to engage with the “ideational and material project related to “Asia-Pacific.””<sup>205</sup>

Initially in 1991 India identified Japan – the then dominant economic power of East Asia – as a potential partner in India’s economic engagement. J. N. Dixit, a former Foreign Secretary of India states that “Japan was identified as one of the most important sources of both investment and technology by the Government of India.”<sup>206</sup> This fact is another suggestion that the Indian political elite was aware of discourse around the Pacific in its previous guise of “Pacific Century” and was keen to become a part of that discourse. Japan, indeed, was the first country to send a substantial business delegation to India in December 1991. However this delegation expressed reservations and even submitted a 21-point memorandum proposing further reforms that would make India a really attractive investment destination.<sup>207</sup> Indian Prime Minister Narsimha Rao subsequently visited Japan in 1992, but it proved largely fruitless.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>202</sup> M. G. G. Pillai, “India and South East Asia – Search for a Role”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 29, 1995, p 1911

<sup>203</sup> G. V. C. Naidu asserts that Southeast Asia remains the pivot ... of the Look East policy, because of its geostrategic location and ASEAN’s key role in the promotion of regionalism and multilateralism. See G. V.C. Naidu, “India and the South East Asia”, *International Studies*, 47(2–4) 285–304 © 2010 JNU SAGE Publications

<sup>204</sup> Yashwant Sinha, ‘Resurgent India in Asia’, 29 September, 2003, <http://mea.gov.in/speech/2003/09/29ss09.htm>. Accessed 1 September 2006; Cited by David Scot, “Strategic imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia,”

<sup>205</sup> See Thomas Wilkins, “The new “Pacific Century” and the rise of China: an international relations perspective”

<sup>206</sup> J. N. Dixit, *My South Block Years – Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary* (New Delhi; UPSB, 1996), p. 254

<sup>207</sup> B. A. Iqbal, “Attracting Investments” in “*Wooing Japan*”, p. 27

<sup>208</sup> Dixit concludes his chapter on Japan by regretting that for this country, “relations with India occupy a secondary priority” See J. N. Dixit, *My South Block Years – Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary*

An important outcome of India's initial failure to engage with Japan was that its political elite realized that any success of their engagement with the great powers of the Asia-Pacific (and the Asia-Pacific project) would depend on India's ability to engage with trade and globalization. This was a new "learning" for the Indian state in its pursuit of a new identity in the East. The ability to adopt this new learning and reflect it in its external behaviour towards the region was essential to construct a new image for the Indian state in the collective cognition of political elites of the region. In fact this learning was not absolutely new in 1991, being also evident in Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China (1988). The visit was an attempt to change the track of Sino-Indian relations by opening up discussions on border disputes and exploring the prospects of bilateral economic cooperation. It prompted an Indian analyst to comment that "the message that came out of Rajiv's visit to China was to keep conflicts and disagreements on the back burner and start exploring areas of cooperation and understanding."<sup>209</sup> India's current Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is explicit in acknowledging the role of the East in India's new learning about trade and globalization. Singh pays tribute to the countries of South East and East Asia "for boosting India's confidence ....and for shaping India's thinking on globalization and the means to deal with it."<sup>210</sup>

The other key learning from Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China, and the Indian state's subsequent engagement with the states in South East Asia and East Asia was to pursue economic engagement in spite of pending security issues in its external relations. The region is generous with evidence such as China-Taiwan, China-Japan, China-South Korea, US-China, China-ASEAN relations, where grave security concerns have not restricted the prospect of mutual trade and economic cooperation. This explains the Indian state's new desire to emphasize trade and economic cooperation in spite of its pending security disputes. The learning can easily be attributed as a mirroring of its interaction with the states of South East and East Asia.<sup>211</sup> It is important to note that this is not a liberalist argument, rather it is a constructivist argument which posits that interests are formed (and become redundant) on the basis of identity formation in international politics. This emerging norm was a radical departure from the previous norm where security matters dominated India's strategic choices over other interests (a symbol of its identity of "South Asian power").

Since 1991 India has pursued its LEP with vigor and has made considerable advances in integrating within the Asia-Pacific region. India's conscious efforts to forge closer economic ties with ASEAN member states have paid dividends; bilateral relations between India and ASEAN have improved rapidly. India became a sectoral dialogue partner in March 1993 in the three areas of trade, investment and tourism, a full dialogue partner in 1995, and member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 1996. India's bilateral trade with the ASEAN

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<sup>209</sup> S. D. Muni, "India's 'Look East' Policy: The Strategic Dimension,"

<sup>210</sup> Manmohan Singh, 'Address at the 16th Asian Corporate Conference', Mumbai, 18 March 2006.

<sup>211</sup> This is why it is not a coincidence that I. K. Gujaral, India's Prime Minister in the mid 1990s, who was an advocate of India's pursuit of an Asia-Pacific identity, was also a firm supporter of granting unilateral trade favours to its smaller South Asian neighbours.

region trebled in a decade, rising from a mere US\$ 2.3 billion in 1991 to US\$ 7.8 billion in 2001-02.

The above evidence substantiates the constructivist argument that identity is a key determinant of a state's action, and perception towards "interests," in the international system. When the Indian political elite's conception about its "self" began to change, the policies and strategic choices of the Indian state underpinned on that "self-conception" also began to change. Since trade and commerce were the cornerstones of any discourse around the Asia-Pacific region, the Indian state's Asia-Pacific identity cannot be construed without a changed perception towards trade and commerce in its external behavior, especially towards East.

As security formed the third essential pillar (along with trade and globalization) underpinning the "Asia-Pacific project," India made steady progress in enhancing its strategic engagement with the region. India's early strategic maneuvering within the region was dual focused. The first objective was to establish high level defence contacts at a bilateral level and facilitate defence cooperation. The second objective was to gain access within the regional security mechanism and promote confidence building and regional peace and stability. ASEAN took the lead in realizing India's strategic importance due to its sheer size and position, and importantly because "the trade routes that pass through the heart of Southeast Asia also pass through the Indian Ocean."<sup>212</sup> Many ASEAN states such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia were Indian Ocean littoral states and were keen to coordinate their Indian Ocean interests with India.<sup>213</sup>

By the mid 1990s India had achieved a modest success in engaging with its eastern neighbors at a bilateral, multilateral, and conceptual level. This has led to a change in the Indian political elite's conception about its "self," where it began to conceive India as a part of its fast consolidating eastern neighborhood. This change in the Indian political elite's self-conception was manifested in their emphasis on India's geographical inseparability, and cultural association with the states of South East Asia, suggesting a desire to create a new identity for the Indian state in the region.<sup>214</sup>

It was by the turn of the century that India's sustained economic growth and success in overcoming post-Pokharan (nuclear explosion) economic and diplomatic sanctions gave a new confidence to engage with the region. This period also coincided with India's launch of the second phase of LEP which focused on political and strategic engagement with the wider Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN was quick to realize India's rising significance and elevated its

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<sup>212</sup> Sandy Gordon, "India and Southeast Asia: A Renaissance in Relations?" in Gordon and Henningham (eds.), *India Looks East*, pp. 207–29.

<sup>213</sup> Tan Tai Yong & See Chak Mun. The Evolution of India–ASEAN Relations, *India Review*, (2009) 8:1, 20–42,

<sup>214</sup> The then External Affairs Minister I. K. Gujral asserted that "we see the full dialogue partnership with ASEAN as the manifestation of our Look-East destiny. This is because we are geographically inseparable, culturally conjoined now more than ever before, economically and strategically interdependent and complementary..." Cited in Christophe Jaffrelot, 'India's Look East Policy: An Asianist Strategy in Perspective', *India Review*, 2003, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 35–68. Also see *The Times of India*, July 25, 1996.

sectoral partnership to a summit level dialogue partnership in 2002. India further proposed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) at the first India-ASEAN summit in Cambodia in 2002 to enhance its credibility within the region.

Improved Indo-US relations were also a catalyst in India's emergence as an Asia-Pacific player and, in turn, the consolidation of India's Asia-Pacific identity. It was only after the reordering of their relations that many traditional allies of the US such as Japan, Australia, Thailand and South Korea became more accessible to the idea of security cooperation with India. India's ability and willingness to provide maritime protection to US military supply shipping during "Operation Enduring Freedom" has had a profound influence on Japan's political elite about India's new found strategic maturity.

Buoyed by these developments, the Indian political elite's conception about its "self" as an "Asia-Pacific player" gained maturity. In 2002, the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, declared India as an Asia-Pacific player when commenting on not being invited in an important Track-II "Shangri-la Dialogue" sponsored by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Vajpayee asserted: "India's belonging to the Asia-Pacific community is a geographical fact and a political reality. It does not require formal membership of any regional organization for its recognition or sustenance"<sup>215</sup> This statement manifests the Indian political elite's strong conviction about India's being an Asia-Pacific state. Within a decade of pursuance of the Look East policy, the Indian strategic elite's perception changed from being an outside player seeking partnership with the region, to a state with an unquestionable Asia-Pacific identity.

In support of this claim for an Asia-Pacific identity, the Indian strategic elite consciously began redrawing the limits of India's strategic geography. That is to say, India's strategic geography was being gradually extended within their strategic elite's collective cognition to include SCS and the maritime domain of the Asia-Pacific region as its new limits. The then Defence Minister, George Fernandes (2000), asserted that India's "area of interest ...extends from north of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea." The new Prime Minister in New Delhi, Manmohan Singh, reiterated the ongoing shift in conception of India's strategic geography in its collective cognition by stating that "our strategic footprint covers ... South-East Asia and beyond ... Awareness of this reality should inform and animate our strategic thinking and defence planning."<sup>216</sup> This was a new development in redefining the limits of India's strategic geography, especially towards the east, and was substantiated by regular naval deployment in the SCS since then. The reconfiguring of India's strategic geography was being reflected in the upgrading of naval infrastructure that includes the setting up of the Far Eastern Naval Command (FENC) at Port Blair on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Many analysts opine that "the political-strategic intent of the new base is to build sinews for

<sup>215</sup> Atal B. Vajpayee, "India's Perspective on ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Region." Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 2003. Cited in David Scot, "Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia", *International Studies*, 2007 44:

<sup>216</sup> "PM's Address at the Combined Commander's Conference," 24 October, Cited by David Scot, "Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia," *International Studies*, 44, 2 (2007): 123-40

India's "Look-East" policy not only in trade terms but also in the context of the evolving maritime balance of power in the Asia-Pacific."<sup>217</sup> The then Chief of Naval Staff, Arun Prakash, observed "it is imperative for India, therefore, to retain a strong maritime capability in order to maintain a balance of maritime power in the Indian Ocean, as well as the larger Asia-Pacific region."<sup>218</sup>

Such dispositions of the Indian strategic elite were equally complimented by other major players of the region, and in the process consolidated India's identity as an Asia-Pacific player. In 2002, US Deputy Secretary of Defence, Paul Wolfowitz, commented about India's role in Asia-Pacific; "I think it's always been a little bit strange, and it gets stranger each year, to talk about East Asian security without bringing in India ... India's such a big part of the East Asian equation ..."<sup>219</sup> Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo noted that, "We see India's presence as being a beneficial and beneficent one to all of us in South-east Asia."<sup>220</sup> India's efforts to be recognized as an Asia-Pacific player received major success when Southeast Asian nations such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, as well as Japan and South Korea, supported India's participation in the inaugural East Asian Summit (EAS) in 2005.<sup>221</sup> This is a clear sign where India's Asia-Pacific identity began gaining traction in international politics.

It is important to note that this is a case of identity transformation and not a power transformation, as is reflected in New Delhi's cautious choice in referring to India as a "player"<sup>222</sup> in the Asia-Pacific, instead of more conventional "power". Though, seemingly insignificant, it is not an inadvertent selection of words. According to *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, there is an element of coercion in the definition of power which emancipates the word "player" from any such coercive overtones.<sup>223</sup> Previously India's projection of its self image as a "South Asian power," has been a source of anxiety and apprehension for the ASEAN states.<sup>224</sup> India has to experience this anxiety in the early 1990s in its attempts to seek entry into the region's multilateral forums.

Therefore the primary goal in India's Asia-Pacific identity formation project was to attribute an amenable image to India's material engagement with the region by application of discursive power. An essential strategy towards this goal was to allay the fears and security

<sup>217</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "India Navy Drops another Anchor," *Asia Times*, (2006) 17 October.

<sup>218</sup> Arun Prakash, "Shaping India's Maritime Strategy—Opportunities and Challenges," November, 2005, [http://indiannavy.nic.in/cns\\_add2](http://indiannavy.nic.in/cns_add2).

<sup>219</sup> Cited by David Scot, "Strategic Imperatives of India as an Emerging Player in Pacific Asia," *International Studies*, 44, 2 (2007): 123–40

<sup>220</sup> Amit Baruah, "India has Legitimate Interests in South East Asia: George Yeo," *The Hindu*, January 24, 2007, Available at <http://www.hindu.com/2007/01/24/stories/2007012413390100.htm>

<sup>221</sup> "East Asia Summit: In the Shadow of Sharp Divisions," *People's Daily*, December 5, 2005

<sup>222</sup> See Indian media reports where the word "player" is associated with India's role in the Asia-Pacific region. Amit Baruah, "India emerging key player in Asia-Pacific region," *The Hindu*, July 23, 2001, Available online at <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/2001/07/23/stories/0323000f.htm>

<sup>223</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2007)

<sup>224</sup> See for instance Tan Tai Yong & See Chak Mun, "The Evolution of India–ASEAN Relations," *India Review*, (2009) 8:1, 20–42,

concerns of the smaller states of the South East Asian region. This was being ensured by frequent calls of the Indian political elite. Jaswant Singh, the then Minister of External Affairs, stated in Singapore (2000) that “the engagement of a militarily stronger, economically prosperous, democratic, and secular India imparts greater stability to the region.”<sup>225</sup> Such efforts in constructing a non-threatening image in the region have been aptly substantiated by the Indian strategic community’s subtle claim of the absence of any legacy of India’s domination of the region, unlike other major players of the region, China and Japan. This claim has been widely accepted in the region and has assisted in the reaffirmation of a non-threatening image of India’s emerging Asia-Pacific identity.<sup>226</sup>

This new non threatening image in India’s emerging Asia-Pacific identity was further accentuated by an accompanied change in the Indian state’s strategic behavior in South Asia, where it preferred to abstain from its traditional penchant of strategically asserting itself on its smaller neighbors. That is to say, the reason why India has become less assertive in South Asia is because India has made it a point to project itself as a non hegemonic player with emphasis on promoting a cooperative partnership in the Asia-Pacific region. It is important to note that the ASEAN region is extremely sensitive to sovereignty related issues and prefers to resolve disputes through the unique ‘ASEAN way’ of informal, consensual, and incremental decision-making.<sup>227</sup> The Indian state has increasingly mirrored this behaviour in its foreign security behaviour in South Asia, so as to support, or at least avoid conflict in India’s claim to an Asia-Pacific identity.

Since the turn of the century the Indian state has invested significant diplomatic capital in construing one homogenous identity of an Asia-Pacific player. Recently India announced the appointment of a separate ambassador for the ASEAN region<sup>228</sup> – a clear sign that the Indian state is increasingly attempting to align its geo-economic and diplomatic endeavors in the region. Even previously, on more than one occasion, New Delhi has collectively briefed its diplomats within the region. Such endeavors on the one hand assist in coordinating India’s relations with the region and on the other consolidate India’s identity as an Asia-Pacific player. It is important to note that administrative and policy consolidation is an essential aspect of any identity formation project as it contributes in projecting one homogenous

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<sup>225</sup> Cited in Laxman Bahroo, “India Looks East,” *Bharat Rakshak Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 3, <http://www.bharatrakshak.com/MONITOR/ISSUE3-3/bahroo.html>.

<sup>226</sup> Horimoto Takenori, “The World as India Sees It,” *Gaiko Forum: Japanese Perspectives on Foreign Affairs* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall 2006), p. 6.

<sup>227</sup> There are many interpretations of the ASEAN way in security matters but the underlying sentiment is aversion to the use of force and coercion in sovereignty disputes in the region. See Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter, 2007/2008), pp. 113-157

<sup>228</sup> “Manmohan Singh to launch new initiatives to strengthen India-ASEAN ties” *The Indian Express*, October 09, 2013, Available at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/manmohan-singh-to-launch-new-initiatives-to-strengthen-indiaasean-ties/1180442/>

identity of an actor in international politics.<sup>229</sup> India's attempt signifies its desire to project an identity of a "serious" player in the Asia-Pacific with a long term goal and vision about the region, rather than just an opportunistic state that engages sparingly with the region.

To what extent India's new Asia-Pacific identity has appeased its much sought after goal of "recognition" in the international system can be a matter of empirical analysis. But what is discernible from Indian foreign security behavior is the fact that India is beginning to take its identity as an Asia-Pacific player very seriously. This explains why an otherwise reticent Indian state surprised the world by asserting itself in the South China Sea in November 2011 when it chose to ignore an official Chinese demarche seeking to restrict India from exploring oil on the invitation of Vietnam. In contrast India has become less assertive in the South Asian region towards both the South Asian states and the alleged Chinese encroachment along its northern borders. This is clearly a case of new interest formation (in the Asia-Pacific) and "missing interests"<sup>230</sup> (in South Asia), due to its changing identity in international politics, where India's strategic focus has shifted away from the confines of South Asia towards the Asia-Pacific.

This ongoing identity shift is also a critical factor responsible for the rise of the navy's importance in India's strategic calculations. India's previous identity of a South Asian power has restricted the boundary of India's strategic geography within the South Asian sub-continent. This fact had restricted the Indian strategic elite's self conception of India as a continental power, and was responsible for the continental outlook of its national security. The ocean (Indian Ocean) remained at the fringes of India's strategic geography, and the continental geography of South Asia formed the basis of the continental security mindset of the India strategic elite. The new aspirant Asia-Pacific identity has fundamentally changed the Indian strategic elite's self-conception of India's strategic geography. The geography of the Asia-Pacific region is essentially maritime as opposed to the continental geography of South Asia. The mental maps<sup>231</sup> of Indian security planners which previously ignored the maritime component of its strategic geography<sup>232</sup> became observant towards the opportunity

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<sup>229</sup> The identity of the European Union as a single homogenous player in international politics gained traction only after sustained administrative and policy consolidation. See Ian Manners and Richard G. Whitman, "The difference engine': constructing and representing the international identity of the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy* 10:3 June 2003: 380–404

<sup>230</sup> Constructivism theorizes the meaning of absent interests, as produced absences, omissions that are the understandable product of social practices and structure. See Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory"

<sup>231</sup> The concept of mental maps, as explained by Alan K. Henrikson, supplies scholars with a novel way to appraise how statesmen and soldiers see, interpret and act on their political and strategic surroundings. See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers" *International Political Science Review* 1, no. 4, 1980: pp. 495–530. Also See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Maps as an 'Idea': The Role of Cartographic Imagery during the Second World War", *American Cartographer* 2, 1975: pp. 19–53, See Alan K. Henrikson, Distance and Foreign Policy: A Political Geography Approach" *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 4, 2002, pp. 437–466.

<sup>232</sup> Few analysts have noted the Indian political elite's historical myopia towards the maritime component of its strategic geography. See James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009)

and challenges beckoning from the oceans. This was one important reason for the general enthusiasm in New Delhi towards its naval power after the end of the Cold War.<sup>233</sup> It also explains the curious representation of India as a “maritime democracy” in the Indian strategic community’s discourse about relations with the states of South East and East Asia.<sup>234</sup>

Though there are many implications of India’s emerging Asia-Pacific identity, one critical development is India’s increasing amenability to a great power role in its bilateral security disputes. It is important to note that historically, India has been averse to any external intervention in its bilateral security matters. In contrast, after the end of the Cold War there was a clear discernible change in Indian foreign security behaviour where India became willing to work with the great powers within South Asia.<sup>235</sup> Indian realists note this change in the Indian strategic elite’s collective cognition but the source of this new learning in Indian strategic behaviour is not elaborated. It is argued here that this change in Indian strategic behaviour can be attributed to India’s emerging Asia-Pacific identity, as the states of the Asia-Pacific region are acquiescent to great power facilitation in managing their security issues. The Indian state is mirroring this learning in its foreign security behaviour in South Asia. This is why it is not surprising that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who boldly declared India an Asia-Pacific player, was also amenable for a “facilitator” role for the US in resolving India’s longstanding Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.<sup>236</sup>

What is most important about India’s pursuit of an Asia-Pacific identity is the breath-taking speed of the identity change and the minimum level of contestation offered in this endeavor. Many states in international politics have pursued some aspirant identity at some stage, such as Germany pursuing an identity of a great power in early twentieth century and Russia pursuing an identity of a European power in sixteenth-seventeenth century. Rarely has the identity formation been less contested and less challenged than in the case of India’s approval of being an Asia-Pacific player.<sup>237</sup> In contrast India’s claim to the identity of an Asia-Pacific player has had remarkable support from the contemporary great powers, major powers, and

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<sup>233</sup> The other causative factors being trade and globalization, and the alleged threat of the Chinese navy’s intrusion in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>234</sup> Brahma Chellaney, commenting on India’s relations with Japan says “maritime democracies like Japan and India must work together to help build a stable, liberal, rules-based order in Asia.” It is important to note that such lexicon of maritime democracy is not used to describe India’s engagement towards states on western side of the Indian Ocean. See Brahma Chellaney, “Build Japan-India Naval Ties,” *Japan Times*, 28 December 2011.

<sup>235</sup> For detail on India’s willingness to work with the great powers in South Asia see Rajesh M. Basrur, “Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia,”

<sup>236</sup> See Media report, “Clinton signalled a U.S. role in mediating the problem,” *Asiaweek*, April 7, 2000 Vol. 26 No. 13. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/magazine/2000/0407/nat.viewpoint.html>

<sup>237</sup> Germany’s claim of great power status in early twentieth century resulted in tremendous anxiety leading to the First World War. Similarly Russia’s claim to European great power status throughout sixteenth and seventeenth century was not acknowledged by the contemporary great powers resulting in tremendous anxiety and insecurity in Russia. See Michelle Murray, “Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War,” Also See Iver B. Neumann, “Russia’s Standing as a Great Power, 1494–1815,” in *Russia’s European Choice*, ed. Ted Hopf (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 23. Neumann indicates that the European great powers noted, but did not take seriously, Russia’s claims to great power status.

the smaller states of the region.<sup>238</sup> The only challenge and contest to India's claim to identity as an Asia-Pacific player has understandably come from its traditional rival, China, which has sought to block India's entry into the regional security architecture on the pretext of India's not belonging to the region. Nonetheless, this challenge has been insignificant in the face of overwhelming support of other group members, and India's identity transformation to an Asia-Pacific player has been remarkably swift and peaceful.

It would not be exaggerating to conclude with what Iver Newmann calls the "power of images in identity formation in international politics."<sup>239</sup> Newmann argues that the self drawn images of power by a nation state enhance the power of images. That is to say, India's self drawn image of an Asia-Pacific player has been enhanced by the reciprocal image of an Asia-Pacific power attributed to India by external actors.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This article has examined India's emerging identity from a "South Asian power" to an "Asia-Pacific player." It has offered a critique to the existing domination of material factor based analysis of India's increasing engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, and has established *identity* as a determinant variable in explaining India's engagement with the region. The constructivist claim that identity is the basis of interests in international politics was at the heart of this study. It has argued that the Indian state has a dual goal of "security" and "recognition" within the international system and that it is seeking to maximize its "recognition" by pursuing an Asia-Pacific identity. The claim that states seek "recognition" along with the goal of "security" in the international system is newly emerging within constructivist research programs. This article contributes to the existing constructivist research program by offering an empirical analysis of the role of aspirant identity in determining the strategic behavior of a middle power like India. It argues that the Indian strategic elite's desire for a new identity towards the east in the Asia-Pacific is at the center of many changes in India's strategic behavior. Towards this goal, this article has first analyzed how the concept of identity operates in India's foreign security behavior and then re-conceptualized the sources of change in Indian strategic thinking after the end of the Cold War. It has argued that the Indian state faced a "crisis of identity" rather than a "crisis of security" (as conventionally believed) at the end of the Cold war, that precipitated the desire for a new identity that could secure the cherished goal of "recognition" within the international system. The article has also examined how the Indian state has construed its Asia-Pacific identity and is increasingly exhibiting norms associated with this identity in its foreign security behavior. The article accentuates that the growing enthusiasm of naval power in New Delhi is an important strategic implication of its emerging Asia-Pacific identity.

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<sup>238</sup> India's role as an emerging Asia-Pacific player has been supported by US, Japan, Australia, Singapore, and other ASEAN states in the region.

<sup>239</sup> Iver Newmann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, London and New York Rutledge, (1996) and Iver Newmann, *Uses of the Other: The 'East' in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, (1998)

## Chapter 5: Implications and Conclusion

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This chapter has the dual aim of conceptualizing the strategic implications of India's changing identity from a sub-continental power of South Asia to an Asia-Pacific player, and concluding the dissertation. The chapter proceeds in two parts. The first part elucidates that India's new found maritime consciousness and enthusiasm for naval power is a fundamental feature of its identity as an Asia-Pacific player. The Indian state is adopting and reflecting this constitutive norm of naval power in its strategic behaviour. The second part of the chapter is a conclusion of this dissertation. It revisits the claims made in Chapter Two and Chapter Three and re-examines the central argument made in this dissertation. The chapter concludes with a statement on the limits of this research and explores a possible future direction for research.

Over the last two decades there has been evidence to suggest that India has pursued a new identity of being an "Asia-Pacific player." To what extent it has succeeded in acquiring this new identity is a matter for empirical analysis, but there are unmistakable signs that the Indian strategic elite's self-conception as an "Asia-Pacific player" is gaining traction in India's foreign security behaviour. This identity change, and its accompanying aspirations, is at the core of a new emerging maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elite. The implication of India's changing identity on its emerging maritime consciousness is discernible in two ways. The following section aims to identify those two implications.

### 5.1 Asia-Pacific Identity and Enthusiasm for Naval Power

India's changing identity from a sub-continental power to an Asia-Pacific player has had the most significant impact on its new-found enthusiasm towards naval power. The lexicon of "the Asia-Pacific century" is inextricably linked with this enthusiasm for expanded trade and commerce, and expanding naval power.<sup>240</sup> Since the early twentieth century, states driven by the rhetoric of "the Asia-Pacific century" have demonstrated a proclivity towards developing strong navies. The strength of a state's naval power in the region has become a constitutive feature of its belongingness to the Asia-Pacific region, and hence an Asia-Pacific identity.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when imperialism had a positive connotation in international politics, at least in some capitals of the world, the rhetoric of "the Asia-Pacific era" revolved around the role of naval power in advancing imperialistic interests and underpinning the international status of the aspirant states. Many resident states in the region like Japan and the United States transformed their navies and acquired colonies to gain

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<sup>240</sup> Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp. 41-70. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078658>

prestige in the international system.<sup>241</sup> Japan's defeat of Russia, a traditional European great power, in the Russo-Japanese naval war of 1905 was a major event linking naval power with prestige and identity in the region. The United States (US), driven by the rhetoric of the Pacific age, emerged as a first rate naval power in the early twentieth century under President Theodore Roosevelt and Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. The US acquired the prized colony of the Philippines to claim the status of being the major power in the Pacific region. Mahan's classic work *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* provided the intellectual basis for the modernization and expansion of the U.S. fleet at the end of the nineteenth century, and Mahan became an outstanding authority on the national maritime strategy of the time.<sup>242</sup> The enthusiasm towards naval power became a constitutive norm for states aspiring to status in the Pacific region.

The second half of the twentieth century has seen significant changes in the rhetoric around the Pacific age. Asian states gradually were included as a part of the group identity of belonging to the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>243</sup> Also, the currency of imperialism lost its sheen as a source of status in the international system. But what has not changed in the rhetoric of the Pacific age is the enthusiasm for naval power. Naval power was pursued not only as a means to colony acquisition, but also for the purpose of advancing an individual state's maritime security. The end of the Cold War and the deepening of globalization have further intensified the enthusiasm towards naval power.

Global defence suppliers have noticed the change in the Asia-Pacific region's collective proclivity towards sea power. Jim Hvizd, vice-president of International Strategy and Business Development for Raytheon, a prominent defence contractor firm, notes that the "traditional land border disputes in the Asia-Pacific region have now moved to the maritime environment and each country is now much more focused on their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and gaining full maritime domain awareness."<sup>244</sup> According to a conservative estimate of AMI International, a US naval analysis firm, the Asia-Pacific region makes up roughly twenty-five per cent of the global projected new ship market. AMI projects that "navies within the Asia-Pacific region will spend a combined [US] \$180 billion on almost 800 new ships, surface craft and submarines through to 2031."<sup>245</sup>

For global defence contractors, the Asia-Pacific region has evolved into the second largest naval market in value and number of ships after the US. States like China, India, Japan, South

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<sup>241</sup> Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History,"

<sup>242</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1890).

<sup>243</sup> Japan's Foreign Minister (1967) Miki Takeo was the first statesman to take up the idea of Asia-Pacific in the century old Pacific age rhetoric. See Miki's "Watakushi no Ajia-Taiheiy? k?s?" and other speeches from 1967 in Miki Takeo, *Gikai seiji to tomoni enzetsu hatsugen sh?* (Tokyo: Miki Takeo Shuppan Kinenkai, 1984). Cited by Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp. 41-70.

<sup>244</sup> See Wendell Minnick, "Asia's Naval Procurement Sees Major Growth",

<sup>245</sup> Wendell Minnick, "Asia's Naval Procurement Sees Major Growth", *DefenseNews*, May 19, 2013, Available at <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130519/DEFREG03/305190004/Asia-s-Naval-Procurement-Sees-Major-Growth>. Also see at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-05/14/c\\_132382111.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-05/14/c_132382111.htm)

Korea and Australia are the primary naval market in the region, whereas Malaysia and Indonesia are considered a secondary market.<sup>246</sup> Vietnam is also in the midst of a full-scale fleet modernization.

The enthusiasm for naval power has become a constitutive norm of this group identity of belonging to the Asia-Pacific. The Indian state had been an aspirant to this group identity of Asia-Pacific, therefore reflecting enthusiasm towards naval power. This explains the Indian strategic elite's new-found maritime consciousness since the early 1990s, much before India had truly globalized or had a significant maritime threat. This newfound maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elite is a consequence of their search for a new identity for the Indian state. The Indian strategic elite's traditional ideational blockage about sea power (see Chapter 2) was unlocked by the search for a new identity in the international system.

## 5.2 The Asia-Pacific Identity and India's Changing Strategic Geography

India's embrace of its new-found identity as an Asia-Pacific power has simultaneously affected Indian security planners' conception of their strategic geography. Previously, India's self-conception as a South Asian power has led Indian security planners to conceive of South Asia as the sum total of their strategic geography.<sup>247</sup> As previously explained in the second chapter of this dissertation, the Indian strategic elite suffered from an inability in fusing together the terrestrial and maritime components of their strategic geography. The ocean remained at the fringes of India's strategic geography, and the continental geography of South Asia formed the basis of the continental security mindset of the Indian strategic elite.

Gradually, with change in India's self identification as an Asia-Pacific player, the limit of its strategic geography expanded from the sub-continent of South Asia to the broader Asia-Pacific region. This change in conception of India's strategic geography is at the centre of ideational factors responsible for a new maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elite. The geography of the Asia-Pacific region is essentially maritime as opposed to the continental geography of South Asia. The mental maps<sup>248</sup> of Indian security planners which

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<sup>246</sup> See Wendell Minnick, "Asia's Naval Procurement Sees Major Growth"

<sup>247</sup> D. K. Palit, "India as an Asian Military Power," *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1975), pp. 35-47

<sup>248</sup> The concept of mental maps, as explained by Alan K. Henrikson, supplies scholars with a novel way to appraise how statesmen and soldiers see, interpret and act on their political and strategic surroundings. See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers" *International Political Science Review* 1, no. 4, 1980: pp. 495-530. Also See Alan K. Henrikson, "The Maps as an 'Idea': The Role of Cartographic Imagery during the Second World War", *American Cartographer* 2, 1975: pp. 19-53, See Alan K. Henrikson, Distance and Foreign Policy: A Political Geography Approach" *International Political Science Review* 23, no. 4, 2002, pp. 437-466.

previously ignored the maritime component of its strategic geography<sup>249</sup> became observant towards opportunity and challenges beckoning from the oceans.

Since the late 1990s Indian strategic thinking has been animated with the discourse of dominating the 'strategic arc from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Straits', Sea Lanes of Communication in the Indian Ocean, and seeking further interests in the South China Sea. The period also witnessed a revival of India's interest in the strategic significance of India's previously ignored island territories in the Indian Ocean region. In 2005, India established a Far Eastern Naval Command (FENC) off Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. Many analysts affirm that this development has considerably advanced the Indian navy's ability to interact with the South East and the East Asia region.<sup>250</sup>

The strategic implication of India's changing identity, as explained in the preceding sections of this chapter, is the unlocking of the Indian political elite's traditional ideational blockage towards sea power. The change in self identification has, on the one hand inspired the Indian political elite to adopt and reflect enthusiasm towards naval power and, on the other hand expanded their perception of India's strategic geography by including the oceanic realms towards South East and East Asia as an integral part of its strategic geography.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This study set out to explore the role of identity and related ideational factors in explaining India's new found maritime consciousness and its growing naval power. The need to explore this research question emanates from the existing debate between the role of ideational factors and material factors on India's emerging enthusiasm towards naval power. Many analysts concur that the Indian political elite have long suffered from historical myopia towards naval power suggesting an ideational barrier in the development of Indian naval power.<sup>251</sup> The literature on current growth in Indian naval power emphasizes the role of material factors in explaining India's new found maritime consciousness. The role of ideational factors in explaining this new found enthusiasm for naval power is under examined. Though some recent efforts has been made to explain the rise of the Indian navy from the prism of strategic culture, no attempt has yet been made to examine the role of identity in unlocking the Indian political elite's historical sea-blindness. In this regard this

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<sup>249</sup> Few analysts have noted the Indian political elite's historical myopia towards maritime component of its strategic geography. See James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009)

<sup>250</sup> Ramtanu Maitra, "India bid to rule the waves," *Asia Times*, October 19, 2005, Available at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/GJ19Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GJ19Df03.html) Also see V Jayanth, "Far eastern naval command on the anvil," *The Hindu*, December 26, 2000, Available at <http://hindu.com/2000/12/26/stories/0226000e.htm>

<sup>251</sup> Admiral Arun Prakash, "Rationale and Implications of India's Growing Maritime Power", in *India's Contemporary Security Challenges*, edited by Michael Kugelman, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, D.C, 2011, Available at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA\\_100423\\_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ASIA_100423_IndiaSecurityFINAL.pdf), Admiral Arun Prakash a former Indian chief of naval staff and chairman of the Chief of Staff's Committee.

study can modestly claim to offer a new insight into the role of identity in explaining the rise of the Indian navy, in addition to other existing explanations in the literature. This concluding section aims to state the research question, re-examine the central argument made in this dissertation and conclude with suggestions of a future direction for research.

## 5.4 Claims Revisited

The research problem as stated in Chapter Two and expanded upon in Chapter Three of this dissertation placed the focus on the role of India's changing identity in precipitating the rise of its naval power since the early 1990s. It was imperative to inform the reader about the navy's role in Indian national security in the period preceding the current phase (1991-2013) of naval growth. To this end the first two chapters simultaneously engaged in presenting an overview of the navy's relative role in national security, and stating the research problem.

The selection of this period of study (1991 onwards) was not arbitrary. The period coincides with systemic changes brought by the end of the Cold War and domestic political convulsions resulting from the collapse of India's political and socio-economic structure. There is unanimity in the literature that Indian strategic thinking has undergone a post Cold War revolution, resulting in giant strides in its global profile and international status. Experts trace the evidence of the Indian state's growing enthusiasm towards naval power since the early 1990s.

The second chapter of this dissertation presents the historical evolution of Indian maritime thought and the role of the navy in national security (1947-1991). It examines the Indian political elite's enthusiasm towards naval power in national security and sets the debate between the role of ideational factors and material factors in determining the navy's place in national security calculations.

The key emphasis of the chapter was to identify the ideational constraints on the prominence of naval power in Indian strategic thinking. The chapter does not undermine the material limitation of the Indian state in developing a robust navy, but it identifies a specific ideational barrier towards the application of naval power in the service of India's grand strategy. Two case studies are presented to deduce the Indian political elite's relative neglect of the navy's efficacy in India's grand strategy. A case is made for an ideational barrier to the efficacy of naval power in Indian national security.

The chapter explains the Indian political elite's ideational barrier towards naval power through the concept of 'mental maps', and their inability in fusing the terrestrial and maritime component of India's strategic geography.<sup>252</sup> It also raises the question about the efficacy of identity as a variable in explaining the navy's limited role in India's grand strategy, the

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<sup>252</sup> James R. Holmes, Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "The Logic of Indian Maritime Identity" in *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009)

argument being made that India's self professed identity of being a South Asian power, defined by the limits of its strategic geography to the landmass of South Asia, and hence relegating the oceanic realm to the periphery of its strategic geography. The argument raised about identity is not fully developed in Chapter Two as it is subsequently addressed in Chapters Four and Five. The chapter concludes that apart from material limitations, there were observable ideational constraints restricting the growth of India's naval power.

The third chapter offers a review and critique of current growth (1991-2013) in Indian naval power. The aim of the chapter is to explore the divide between ideational and material factors driving the new maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic community. It begins with an overview of the navy's capability accretion, doctrinal development, and diplomatic endeavours that suggest the rise of the navy's strategic significance in India's security system. Some trends in the Indian state's application of naval power in the service of its grand strategy are identified. The second part of the chapter questions the strategic rationale offered in the literature to explain the rise of the navy.

The chapter notes several material factors mentioned in the literature on the post Cold War rise of the Indian navy as source of emerging maritime consciousness among the Indian political elite. The causative effect of globalization, maritime trade, peninsular geography, the Indian Ocean and balancing against a rising China, on India's emerging maritime consciousness is examined. An important observation to be made in this regard is the fact that the majority view in the literature assumes that, historically, material constraints had restricted the Indian political elite's perceptions towards the navy's role in India's grand strategy. It is in this regard that there is a need to see Chapter One and Chapter Two of this dissertation together collectively.

Having argued in Chapter Two that the Indian political elite's apathy towards naval power was more a function of ideational blockages than mere material constraints, the third chapter critically analyzes those material factors which supposedly explain the emerging maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic community. Some gaps are identified in existing claims in the literature about the strategic rationale of rising Indian naval power. Two specific case studies are presented to evaluate the strategic rationale and the dominant realist argument of balancing against China, India's traditional rival, as an explanation of India's emerging maritime consciousness. A radical shift is noted in the Indian political elite's continental security mindset giving way to an emerging maritime outlook of security. These case studies exhibit the inner contradiction of the realist argument seeking to explain the rise of Indian naval power through material factors and strategic rationale.

The chapter simultaneously makes a case for the ideational factors driving the new maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elites. The Indian political elite's aspiration for a new identity of the Indian state in the international system is noted. The question is raised whether the new emerging maritime consciousness among the Indian political elite can be attributed to their collective aspirations of search or a new external identity for the Indian

state. This question is left unanswered as in Chapter Two, to be addressed in subsequent chapters.

Chapters Two and Three collectively explore the role of ideational and material factors in restricting or facilitating the rise of India's naval power in two different periods of its history. It concludes that ideational factors were predominant over material factors in explaining the Indian political elite's perceptions towards the role of naval power in Indian national security. This claim of the causal power of ideas governing the Indian strategic community's attitude towards naval power leads to an important question about the source of these ideas and norms. What is the source of ideas that has precipitated the new maritime consciousness among the Indian strategic elites? An answer is sought to this question in subsequent chapters (Chapter Four and first part of Chapter Five).

## 5.5 Central Argument of the Thesis

Chapter Four presents the main argument of this dissertation. It relates how India's identity is changing from being a South Asian power to becoming an Asia-Pacific power. It argues that India's aspirations of the *new* identity of becoming an Asia-Pacific player, and its gradual transformation into an Asia-Pacific player, are a source of many changes in India's strategic thinking. The key change is the enthusiasm for a naval power and maritime security outlook in Indian strategic thinking.

The chapter has multiple aims. First was to establish identity as another variable to explain India's transformation from a South Asian power to an Asia-Pacific player. It offers a critique to the realist logic of 'sphere of influence' that has dominated the literature on India's recent transformation into an Asia-Pacific player. It is argued in this chapter that the Indian state is *trading off* its previous identity as a South Asian power for a new aspirant identity of an Asia-Pacific player. The constitutive norms of both these identities are explained in the chapter. It is also argued that many sources of change in India's post Cold War revolution in strategic thinking can be attributed to the Indian state's aspirations for a new identity in East and South East Asia.

The first part of Chapter Five conceptualizes two key strategic implications of India's transforming identity which answers the central puzzle of this dissertation. The puzzle was: what explains the unlocking of the Indian state's traditional ideational barrier towards the naval power? India's shifting identity has instigated the Indian strategic elite to adopt and reflect the enthusiasm towards naval power as is widely prevalent in other states of the Asia-Pacific region.

Simultaneously India's change in identity has influenced the conception of its strategic geography. Previously India's self identification as a South Asian power has kept the ocean at the fringes of its strategic geography, thus resulting in the political elite's inability in fusing together the terrestrial and maritime component of its strategic geography. With a change in

India's identity as an Asia-Pacific player, the ocean began to emerge as a strategic space in Indian strategic thinking where the Indian state's interest had to be defended. This explains the Indian strategic elite's new-found maritime consciousness and enthusiasm towards naval power.

## 5.6 Theoretical Implication

This study has made it clear that there is a powerful ideational impetus for India to have a strong navy. It has made a modest contribution in enhancing the constructivist argument in explaining the rise of Indian navy, though there have been attempts to explain the growth of Indian naval power through the rationale of strategic culture.<sup>253</sup> This study examines the role of identity, and aspirations to a new identity, as the key driver of India's emerging maritime consciousness. It argues that identity, and the search for a new identity, are the source of ideas, norms and other inter-subjective factors responsible for unlocking the traditional sea-blindness of the Indian strategic elite.

This study has made a contribution to what can be called "constructivist realism", which can be distinguished from "realist constructivism". Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon delineate constructivist realism "as a realism that takes norms and ideas seriously as objects of analysis, from 'realist constructivism' – which is a constructivism that involves a self-consistent set of arguments about why power cannot be, in any way, transcended in international politics."<sup>254</sup> This study makes an unmistakable emphasis on the role of norms and ideas (related to identity) in pursuance of power in the international politics.

## 5.7 Recommendation for Future Research

As with many studies, this study raises more questions than it answers. Many of these questions and other areas for follow-up research are presented below. This study has sought to establish the conceptual framework of the role of India's changing identity as an Asia-Pacific player in explaining the Indian state's enthusiasm for naval power. This claim can be further examined by widening the scope of research. The study on the role of identity in security strategy, and more so in the case of Indian strategic behaviour is limited, and therefore offers an interesting area for future research.

This study also promises to draw some similarities with Michelle Murray's social theory of great power politics.<sup>255</sup> Murray presents a case study of German naval ambitions in the early twentieth century and argues that, in addition to physical security, states also want recognition. According to Murray the power-maximizing practices of great powers should be

<sup>253</sup> R. U. Zaman, *Strategic culture and the rise of the Indian Navy*, (2007),

<sup>254</sup> Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, "Constructivist Realism or Realist-Constructivism?" *International Studies Review*, 2004, 6, 337–352

<sup>255</sup> Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War," *Security Studies*, (2010) 19:4, 656-688,

seen as an important component of identity construction and an understudied dimension of contemporary security practice. There is scope for further research in examining the rise of Indian naval power as a case of its power-maximizing behaviour inherent in its identity construction (as an Asia-Pacific player).

This study has made a passing reference to the fact that many changes in India's post Cold war revolution in its strategic thinking can be attributed to India's search for a new identity in East Asia. This claim can be further examined and offers an interesting area for future research.

Finally, it can be concluded that this study has successfully achieved its modest aim of presenting the conceptual framework for identity as the driving factor of India's strategic behaviour. The Indian state's aspiration to become an Asia-Pacific player has unlocked its strategic elite's historical sea-blindness, and is contributing to an emerging maritime consciousness and enthusiasm for naval power in its strategic behaviour.

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